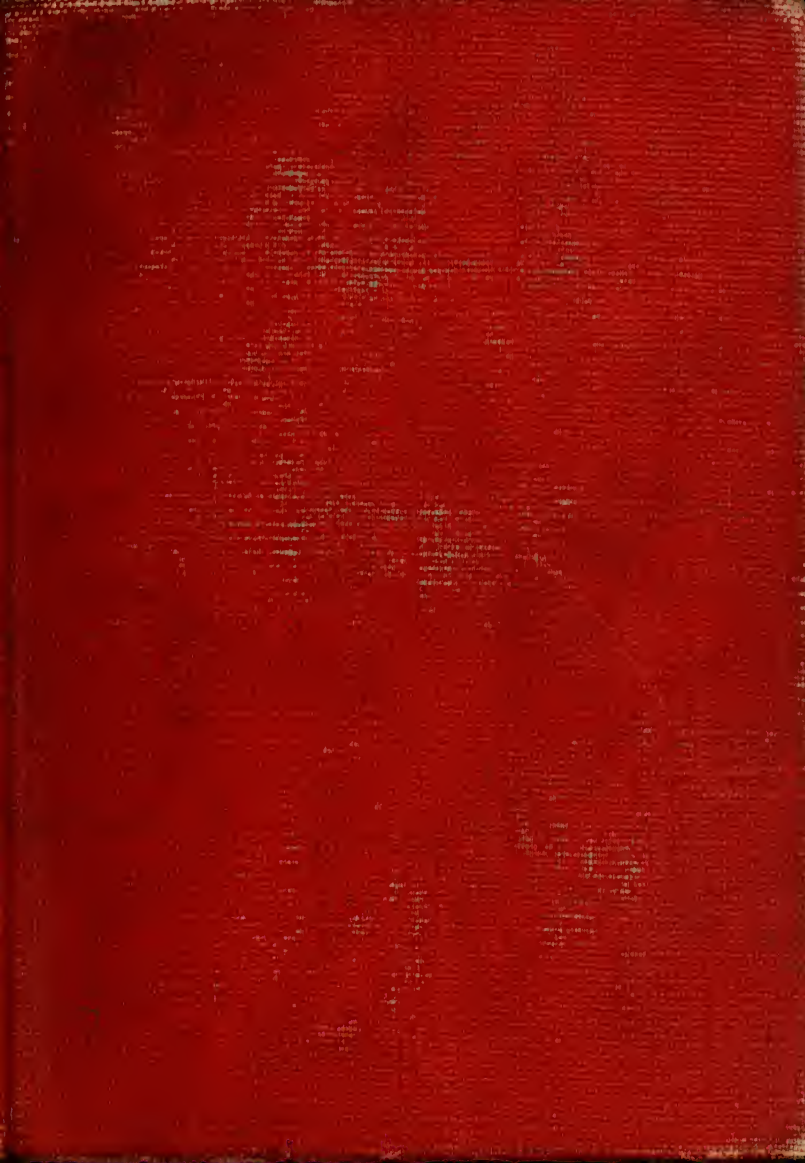






3 3333 01195 7277

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

5th AVENUE AND 42nd STREET

CENTRAL CIRCULATION BRANCH

CHILDREN'S ROOM

Entrance on 42nd Street

Any resident of the city of New York, properly registered, may take a book from the circulation room.

Two volumes (only one of fiction) at a time may be taken for home use, and these must be returned with the applicant's library card within such hours as the rules prescribe.

No book shall be kept out more than two weeks.

For books kept over time a fine of one cent for each day is incurred. Books not returned will be sent for at THE COST OF THE BORROWER, who may not take another book until all charges are paid.

Any book except such as are marked "Not renewable" may be renewed ONCE for an additional two weeks, if application is made.

 Borrowers finding this book pencil-marked, written upon, mutilated or unwarrantably defaced, are expected to report it to the librarian.

Schmidt 5624

Borrowers finding this book pencil-marked, written upon, mutilated or unwarrantably defaced, are expected to report it to the librarian

FORM 041B



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

LIFE STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

THE NIBELUNGS

LIFE STORIES FOR YOUNG
PEOPLE

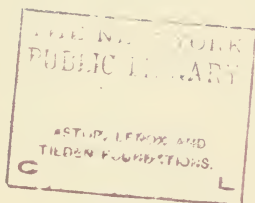
Translated from the German by
GEORGE P. UPTON

12 Vols. Ready

BEETHOVEN	FREDERICK THE GREAT
MOZART	MARIA THERESA
BACH	BARBAROSSA
MAID OF ORLEANS	WILLIAM OF ORANGE
WILLIAM TELL	GUDRUN
THE LITTLE DAUPHIN	THE NIBELUNGS

Illustrated, each 60 cents net

A. C. McCLURG & CO., CHICAGO





DEATH OF SIEGFRIED

LIFE STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

THE NIBELUNGS

*Translated from the German of
Ferdinand Schmidt*

BY

GEORGE P. UPTON

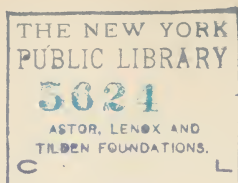
Translator of "Memories," etc.

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS



CHICAGO
A. C. McCLURG & CO.

1906



COPYRIGHT

A. C. McCLURG & Co.

1906

Published September 22, 1906



THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, U.S.A.

Translator's Preface

THE Nibelungen Lied (*Nibelungen*, name of an ancient royal race which possessed a great treasure; *lied*, song or ballad), one of the world's greatest epics, made its appearance in the twelfth or thirteenth century, in South Germany. Its authorship is unknown. The writer, however, did not produce an original work, but made use of still earlier legends which had been handed down orally. The Nibelungen Lied is to be regarded, therefore, as a collection of ballads skilfully united so as to form a connected story. Its hero is Siegfried, who possessed the Nibelung hoard, which he won in Norway. Siegfried wooed Brunhild for Günther, King of Burgundy, and married the king's sister, Kriemhild. He was treacherously slain by Hagen and the hoard was sunk in the Rhine. Kriemhild subsequently was married to Etzel (Attila), King of the Huns, and slew Hagen after he had been overcome in combat, but lost her own life at the hands of the "ancient," Hildebrand. Both historical and mythical elements are mingled in this great poem, which should not be confounded with Wagner's "Ring der Nibelungen," in which he has taken many names from the German epic. The material for his famous music-dramas he found

❖ TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE ❖

in the old Norse version, contained in the Volsunga Saga and the Edda.

The Nibelungen Lied was followed by many similar epics, among them "Gudrun," "The Expedition of Ecken," the tale of "King Laurin," "Rosen-garten," and others, but The Nibelungen Lied is the greatest of all the German national traditions. One writer, in his description of the poem, says :

"Feudal loyalty and martial courage were the great virtues of these heroes. The poem contains a tale of revenge ; but all the plot turns on the principle of loyalty, in obedience to which thousands lost their lives in a quarrel which had at first involved only two or three leading characters. Though this singular poem contains many traits of a warlike age, and closes with terrible scenes of carnage, it displays hardly a trace of such a motive as personal hatred, except in the character of the heroine."

Considered as types, Siegfried stands for the enthusiasm, beauty, courage, lofty purpose, and high ambition of immortal youth ; Hagen, for fierceness, boldness, savagery, and treachery ; Kriemhild is the type of a gentle, loving nature roused to the highest intensity of furious longing for vengeance. Old as the poem is, it contains the development of all human passions, — manly beauty, heroism, and nobility by the side of unmanly cruelty and treachery ; the blackest unfaithfulness by the side of faithfulness until death ; the foulest of deeds by the side

❧ TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE ❧

of the most loving ; and the tenderest hearts combined with the most heroic souls. But among them all, no character stands out more resplendently as an exemplar for youth than Siegfried, himself the type of immortal youth.

In the making of this translation an older form of English expression has been employed as in better keeping, perhaps, with the older form of German, which was used in the original poem. Some of the more sanguinary descriptions have been toned down, some of the numerous poetical connecting links omitted as being unnecessary, and paragraphs here and there have also been omitted where this did not mar the context, so as to make the volume nearly uniform in size with the others of the series.

G. P. U.

CHICAGO, July 1, 1906.



Contents

I.	WIELAND THE SMITH	13
II.	DIETRICH'S FIGHT WITH ECKE	22
III.	SIEGFRIED IN THE FORGE	30
IV.	SIEGFRIED AND THE NIBELUNGS	35
V.	SIEGFRIED GOES TO BURGUNDY	40
VI.	SIEGFRIED MAKES WAR AGAINST THE SAXONS	45
VII.	THE FESTIVAL	49
VIII.	KING GÜNTHER'S VOYAGE TO ICELAND	53
IX.	THE CONTEST	57
X.	SIEGFRIED VISITS THE NIBELUNGS	62
XI.	THE WELCOME	66
XII.	SIEGFRIED STRIVES WITH BRUNHILD	69
XIII.	THE TWO QUEENS	74
XIV.	THE QUEENS' QUARREL	78
XV.	THE BETRAYAL	81
XVI.	SIEGFRIED'S DEATH	84
XVII.	KRIEMHILD'S GRIEF	93

❖ CONTENTS ❖

XVIII.	THE NIBELUNG HOARD . . .	97
XIX.	KING ETZEL WOOS KRIEMHILD .	100
XX.	ETZEL'S INVITATION TO GÜNTHER	103
XXI.	THE SWAN-MAIDENS	106
XXII.	KRIEMHILD'S WELCOME . . .	113
XXIII.	THE COMRADES	119
XXIV.	THE MINSTREL KNIGHT . . .	125
XXV.	THE BURGUNDIANS GO TO MASS	129
XXVI.	THE FEAST	132
XXVII.	BLÖDELIN AND DANKWART . .	135
XXVIII.	THE STRIFE IN THE HALL . .	139
XXIX.	IRING'S FIGHT WITH HAGEN .	144
XXX.	THE NIGHT OF TERROR . . .	149
XXXI.	THE MARGRAVE RÜDIGER . .	153
XXXII.	HILDEBRAND AND DIETRICH . .	161
XXXIII.	KRIEMHILD'S REVENGE AND DEATH	169

Illustrations

The Death of Siegfried	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Siegfried vanquishes Alberich	62
The Minstrel and Hagen	126
Death of Kriemhild	170

❧ The Nibelungs ❧

Chapter I

Wieland the Smith

IN olden times there lived at Santen on the Rhine a noble pair, Siegmund and Sieglind, King and Queen of Niderland, to whom late in life was born a son. They named the boy Siegfried, and he throve and grew apace, so that none could equal him for beauty or strength, and in all knightly sports and exercises he soon left far behind him the other lads of his age. Now, these were the days of heroes whose fame spread far and wide throughout the world. To listen to tales of their mighty deeds gave even more joy to the bold youth than the call of the hunting-horn or the sound of the battle-trumpet; while to forge good swords that, like the lions' teeth, should pierce through bone and sinew, seemed in truth to him a noble art.

One day his father, Siegmund the King, told to him the tale of Wieland the Smith.

The giant Wadi had a son whose evil fortune it was to be lame, wherefore he besought his father

to let him become a smith. "For," said he, "since with such limbs as these it is plain I may do no knightly deeds, what better lot can be mine than to forge arms fit for heroes to wield?"

"Now hast thou well spoken," replied Wadi, and forthwith took his son to Mime. Mime was the greatest smith in all Hunland, and he kept Wieland for three years and made him master of his art. Nor was this all; for, when the time was spent, his father sent him to two famous dwarfs who dwelt in the Kallova mountains. These dwarfs were possessed of marvellous strength and skill, and would not agree to take Wieland into their forge for a twelve-month save upon payment of a piece of gold.

At the end of the time Wadi came to fetch his son. But Wieland already surpassed the dwarfs in skill and cunning, and they would not let him go. They said to Wadi:

"Let thy son bide with us for yet another twelve-month, and thou shalt have back thy gold." But to this they craftily added that if by any chance he should not appear at the time appointed, Wieland's head must pay the forfeit. To this the giant agreed; but ere he set forth he spoke privately with his son, saying:

"For their own sake they will keep thee yet another year, and at the end thereof for envy they will slay thee. Nevertheless their evil designs shall

❧ WIELAND THE SMITH ❧

avail them not. Three days before the time will I be here, but meanwhile that thou mayest not lack defence, take this sword. Be brave and fearless, and in thy hand it shall prove a sword of vengeance against the mighty dwarfs !”

Then Wadi departed ; whereupon his son drove the keen blade into the ground and hid all traces of it from the sharp eyes of the dwarfs.

Now Wieland plied his craft so lustily, that he wrought many good swords and pieces of armor, and the time went swiftly by. Three days before the end of the year came Wadi ; but the mountain was shut fast, and being weary he lay down before it and slept. And as he slept the dwarfs came forth and spied him ; whereat they loosened a great rock from the side of the mountain, so that it rolled down upon the giant, crushing and killing him. On the third day they brought Wieland forth from the mountain and made pretence to watch for Wadi's coming. But Wieland saw blood spots on the ground, and, looking about more closely, perceived one of his father's feet protruding from a mass of rock. Thereupon a frenzy of grief and rage seized him, and, thrusting his hands into the earth, he drew out the great sword the giant had left him. Meanwhile the dwarfs had fetched their own swords shouting :

“ Now must thou die ! ” But at the sight before
[15]

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

them they were stricken with fear, lest he might be a sorcerer and blast them with his magic.

Wieland gave them no time to recover, but rushed upon them fiercely, nor could all their skill avail against his fury. Although attacked from every side and forced to spring now this way, now that, to avoid their blows, he soon overcame and slew both his foes. Thereupon, after binding up his wounds, he brought out from the mountain a great store of gold, and, loading this, with all his tools, upon a horse, set out upon his journey northward.

At last he came to the sea. Here he felled a stout tree which grew by the shore, and artfully hollowed it so that it might hold him with his tools and treasure, closing it after from within, all save some small openings which he filled with glass. And when all was done he rolled himself, with the tree, into the water, and was borne away by the wind and waves.

Thus eighteen days went by and but little was left of his store of meat and honey, when at last the island of Jutland loomed near at hand. Now it chanced that some of the King's folk were fishing in the sea and they seized the tree-trunk and drew it to the land. When the King came to look at the strange craft he bade them cleave it asunder, but at this Wieland gave such a shout that all who heard

❧ WIELAND THE SMITH ❧

were smitten with fear of the spirit dwelling within the tree,—for so they deemed him. Thereupon he opened the trunk himself and stepped forth, offering his service to the King; and the King, nothing loath to have such a follower, made him welcome. Henceforth he abode at the court.

Among Wieland's other duties was the care of the King's three best table-knives; and it chanced one day, after twelve months had passed, that the sharpest of the knives slipped from his hand and fell into the sea. He betook himself at once to the King's smith, Amilias, and finding no one in the forge, fell to work and made a new knife so like the lost one that none could tell it was not the same. Also he wrought a curious three-edged nail, and this he left upon the anvil. Scarcely had he gone when Amilias, the smith, returned, and great was his surprise to find so strange a thing upon his anvil, nor could he guess by whose hand it had been forged. Wieland laid the new knife upon the King's table as was his wont, nor did the King perceive the change. But lo! as he cut his bread, the blade well-nigh pierced the board. Then the King swore that no other than Wieland, who had so skilfully fashioned the tree-boat, could have wrought such a knife, and Wieland confessed that this was so. Amilias, the smith, hearing this, was filled with envy and grew very wroth. He indignantly denied

the truth of Wieland's words, and challenged him to a trial of skill.

"Now, forsooth, I will set ye the tasks," outspoke the King. "Within the space of twelve moons thou, Amilias, shalt forge a helm and coat of mail, and thou, Wieland, a sword. But an thy sword cleave not Amilias's helm and mail at one stroke, then art thou held forsworn and for that thy head shall fall!"

Forthwith Amilias betook himself to his anvil. He labored early and late till he had wrought a suit of armor so strong and heavy that the champion who should wear it must needs have the strength of three men. But when half the year was gone not a blow had Wieland dealt with his hammer. The King warned him, and caused a forge to be built for him; yet again the months slipped by and he paid no heed to his task.

At length when it lacked but two months of the appointed time, he fell to work and in seven days had forged a sword. To test its keenness, he held it in a stream wherein some handfuls of loose wool had been thrown. As they drifted against the edge of the blade they were instantly severed; whereat the King was amazed and acknowledged that never yet had such a sword been seen. Nor did his wonder lessen when Wieland began to file the blade into small bits. These he welded together again



and at the end of thirteen days a second sword was made even sharper than the first. It cut through a bunch of the floating wool full two feet thick when it had scarcely touched the edge; and the King pronounced the sword a priceless treasure.

Yet once again did Wieland file it into bits, and from the pieces in three more weeks forge a third sword. The blade, richly inlaid with gold, flashed like the lightning and would sever a hair that fell upon its edge, while the handle was set in curious fashion with precious stones. The King marvelled greatly at this wondrous feat, and would have kept the great sword, which was called Mimung, for himself; but Wieland hid it and soon made another for the King.

Meanwhile Amilias had wrought a second suit of armor still heavier and more massive than the first, and tried its strength with many weapons. But the keenest swords and heaviest battle-axes could scarce dent its surface, much less pierce or destroy it. Wherefore the smith awaited with calmness the day of the trial, never doubting he should win the test.

At last the time was come. Amilias strode haughtily into the great hall, clad in his massive armor, the mighty helm upon his head, and soon was obliged to sit upon a stool, so oppressive was their weight. Then came Wieland, and as he drew

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

his great sword, the whole hall seemed filled with light. The King and all his chiefs formed a circle about the two smiths and again the King demanded:

“Was it thou, Wieland, who did forge the knife?”

And again Wieland answered: “Of a truth, my lord, it was I.”

Again, too, Amilias denied it, whereupon Wieland strode to his side, and flung his lying words back to him. But the smith only laughed a scornful laugh and said:

“Fool! Soon shall thy false head roll upon the ground and thereby prove me right!”

Hereupon the King gave the signal. Quick as thought the good sword Mimung flashed in the air, and descended so swiftly that none could mark its flight, cleaving Amilias in twain, through helm and head, mail and body, and even through the stool on which he sat. Then Wieland said to the smith:

“How feelest thou?”

And Amilias replied: “I feel as it were a stream of ice-cold water had been poured over my body.”

“Shake thyself!” said Wieland; and Amilias shook himself, whereat, with a great crash down fell his two halves from the stool, one to the right, the other to the left.

“It was indeed thou that forged the knife,” cried

❧ WIELAND THE SMITH ❧

the King; "henceforth thou shalt be my master smith!"

And so it came to pass. Nor was there any in all the land to equal him for skill and cunning; and from that time Wieland was renowned as the greatest of all smiths.

Chapter II

Dietrich's Fight with Ecke

NOW, it chanced one day that a knight of Siegmund's court returned after long wandering in foreign lands, and the King sent for him forthwith, that himself and his son Siegfried might hear what was toward in the world without. Thereupon the knight told them many stirring tales of King Günther, of Hagen the Grim, of old Hildebrand, and yet others; and the last was the tale of Dietrich's Fight with Ecke.

In a distant heathen country there dwelt three beautiful queens. One day they sat together, and with them the three mightiest champions in the land; and they fell to praising the valor of Dietrich of Bern, of whose deeds great tales were told, and they vowed he must be the bravest and strongest knight alive. This greatly vexed the three heroes, and most of all the greatest of them, who was called Ecke; and he said:

"In truth unto this day there hath been no man who could withstand me, nor shall this mighty Dietrich of Bern!"

At these bold words the queens were glad, and one said to him :

“An thou shalt overcome Dietrich and bring him to us alive, so shalt thou choose which one of us thou wilt for thy wife !”

Then Ecke began forthwith to prepare for his departure, and did but laugh to scorn a certain knight who, having seen Dietrich and knowing of his great prowess, had warned Ecke to take heed for his life. When all was ready, one of the queens bestowed on him a coat of mail, the golden links of which had been toughened by being dipped in dragon's blood, and girded him with a shining sword ; the second's gift was a splendid shield ; while the third placed upon his head a helm of gold. And there was led forth for him their noblest steed ; but this he refused, saying :

“I will not take the steed, for not long might he bear my weight ; nor is it needful, since for fourteen days and nights I can fare, knowing neither hunger nor fatigue.”

Thereupon Ecke set bravely forth and was soon lost in the depths of the forest, shield and harness ringing so loudly among the trees that bird and beast fled before him in affright. After some days' journeying he learned it was but a day since that Dietrich had been in Bern (Verona) ; whereat he hastened forthwith to that city. When the people

beheld the gigantic hero they were stricken with terror; for the flashing of his armor in the sunlight was like fire, and they feared lest this mighty being should set the whole city ablaze. But old Hildebrand, who had been Dietrich's master-at-arms, approached him fearlessly; whereupon Ecke asked him where Dietrich might be found, and Hildebrand said:

“It was but yestermorn that Dietrich rode hence toward the Tyrol. Seek him there an thou wilt, bold knight; methinks he will not avoid thee!”

So Ecke hastened after on the road which Dietrich had taken. But ere he had gone far he encountered a huge monster, half horse, half man, which he slew after a fierce struggle.

At last one day he came upon a horse tied to a linden tree, while on the ground near by lay a knight with wounds upon him so fearful it seemed to Ecke naught but a lightning stroke could have dealt them. But from the dying man he learned that the lightning had been no other than the stout arm of Dietrich of Bern. The knight with his three brethren had attacked Dietrich, whereby he had been wounded unto death and the three brethren slain. Then Ecke asked which way Dietrich had taken, and made off with all speed to overtake him; nor was it long ere he saw the gleam of the hero's great helm, called Hildegriem, among the shades

❧ DIETRICH'S FIGHT ❧

of the forest. But Ecke's armor glittered likewise, and Dietrich becoming aware of it, he halted and waited for Ecke to draw nigh. Then Ecke asked :

"Art thou that Dietrich of Bern, the three queens so greatly desire to look upon?"

And Dietrich answered: "Many are there of that name in Bern, but an thou seekest the son of Dittmar, of a truth thou hast indeed found him."

Then Ecke challenged him to mortal combat; but it was scarce an hour since Dietrich had fought with the four knights and vanquished them, so that he was nowise desirous for a struggle with Ecke, who in stature, moreover, was like a giant beside him. Then Ecke sought to tempt him, saying:

"Seest thou this gold armor of mine? With dragon's blood have its links been toughened, while this helm is the work of no less cunning hands than Wieland's, the mightiest smith in all Jutland. It was wrought from a dragon's skull. Overlaid with gold is it, and lined with steel. They shall be thine an thou overcomest me."

But Dietrich shook his head and made answer that his own helm and harness were good and he asked no better. None the less did Ecke still persist, and drawing his sword, said:

"Behold this wondrous blade. It was cunningly

forged by dwarfs in the Tyrol. Twelve months was it in the tempering, and many it hath slain, among them the giant Grimm. From a diamond was the fastening wrought, the hilt from a griffin's horn; inlaid with gold is the sheath, and the tip of it is a ruby. Mighty is it for length and breadth, and Sachs is its name!"

At last, seeing his boasting words were of no avail, he grew angry and cried out, scornfully: "Dietrich thou mayst call thyself, forsooth, but never art thou Dietrich of Bern, the son of Dittmar, the world-renowned hero whom I seek. As for thee, before all men, aye and women likewise, I will hold thee up to scorn as a laggard knight!"

Then Dietrich warned him, saying: "Fool and braggart! An I deign to fight with thee but one of us shall leave this place alive!"

At this Ecke was overjoyed and he shouted: "Draw thy sword, Sir Champion, and of a truth thou shalt have need of the help of thy God!"

Now by this time it had grown so dark they could distinguish each other only by the gleam of their armor. Ecke called on God to assist Dietrich, but for himself he invoked the aid of the devil.

This roused Dietrich to anger; quickly dismounting he tied his horse to a tree and drew his sword. Thereupon they rushed at each other

❧ DIETRICH'S FIGHT ❧

with such fury that even the gleam of helm and shield was no longer visible, and the air was full of flying sparks.

After they had striven for a space, Dietrich said: "Weary am I from my encounter with the four knights. Let us rest till the morning!"

To this Ecke agreed, and laying himself down forthwith, he slept while Dietrich watched beside him. Toward midnight he roused the sleeper and lay down in his turn. But Ecke burned to renew the conflict, and scarce had the east begun to red-den when he awoke Dietrich with a kick, whereat Dietrich sprang to his feet in a rage and there began such a furious combat as would have filled a timid spirit with terror. The earth shook beneath the feet of the warriors, while links from their harness flew jangling into the grass and the ground was red with their blood. Now they fall, but rise again and lean on their swords a space to recover their breath; then, glaring at each other, they rush to the attack with renewed fury.

As the sun rose, Ecke grasped his great sword with both hands, and with a mighty blow clove the lion on Dietrich's shield and shore through the shield itself, so that Dietrich was fain to seek shelter in a thicket. But Ecke so hotly pressed his yielding foe that Dietrich raised his hands on high and besought the help of God. Then he

smote once with all his strength and bore Ecke to the earth. But Ecke sprang up again forthwith and dealt Dietrich so fierce a blow that it crushed through Hildegriem and made a great wound on his head beneath, while his steed, terrified by the sound, neighed piteously.

Once more Dietrich called on God, but Ecke on the devil; and now for a space each stood firm as a rock mid thunder and lightning, while the blows fell so fast and their blades flashed so swiftly in air, it seemed as there were a dozen swords aloft at once. Foaming with rage, Ecke reviled Dietrich and swore the devil must be helping him; but Dietrich shouted:

“God alone is my aid!” and again hurled Ecke to the ground. A second time he rose and again the fight began. At length, when the sun was far above the mountain tops, Ecke fell for the third time; whereupon Dietrich sprang upon him, tore off his helm and bade him yield. But Ecke, putting forth all his strength, gripped Dietrich with such force that the blood spurted from his wounds. Long and fiercely they strove together upon the ground, till at last Dietrich plunged his sword through a cleft in Ecke’s corselet and into the heart of his fierce foe.

Dietrich looked with awe and even with pity upon the dead form of the gigantic warrior. Seizing

❧ DIETRICH'S FIGHT ❧

a fallen tree, he pried a great rock from the earth and made a grave. In this he laid the body and covered it with earth; then kneeling down he thanked God for his victory and prayed for the lost soul. The carbuncle from Ecke's helm he set in his own cloven Hildegrimm. Then he took the sword Sachs, mounted his horse, and rode back to his own land to bide there till his wounds should be healed. And from that day he bore no other sword than that which he had so hardly won from Ecke in their terrible fight,—the wonderful great Sachs.

Chapter III

Siegfried in the Forge

MANY tales like these did Siegfried hear, of heroes, both of his own and bygone times, till he could no longer restrain his longing to go out into the world in quest of adventure. And all the more urgent was this longing, since even now, at the age of eighteen, there was not a champion in all his father's kingdom that could equal him in the use of sword and spear. So at last he took leave of his parents; nor did they, dear as was their only son to them, deem it otherwise than meet that he should go forth to win a hero's renown. Therefore they invoked God's blessing on him and prayed that he might return to them rich in honor and wisdom, so as to govern well the kingdom when it should fall to him, and be a shining example to his warriors, the champion of the oppressed, and the scourge of evil-doers.

So fared the young knight forth ; to him
The world seemed bathed in light ;
A hero's glory he would win —
Or perish in the fight.

❧ SIEGFRIED IN THE FORGE ❧

Now Siegfried had heard much of the fame of Mime, the great smith, him who had been for three years the master of Wieland, the slayer of Amilias. Thither accordingly he first betook himself, that he might learn to forge weapons. But Mime had workmen, great brawny fellows, who were evil-disposed toward Siegfried and tried to pick a quarrel with him. Soon they came to blows, but Siegfried felled them all, and the strongest one — called Eckenbrecht — he dragged from the forge by his hair. When Mime saw what he had done he was amazed at the giant strength of this youth. He set him to work forthwith and Siegfried, still furious with rage, dealt such mighty blows on the anvil that it burst asunder and was driven into the ground, while iron bar, hammer, and tongs went flying all about the forge.

Here Siegfried abode for many weeks, roaming far and wide through the depths of the forest to chase the deer or capture wild beasts for pastime, leaving them hanging upon the trees. Now Mime, the smith, had a brother, Regin, who, by some wicked enchantment, had been changed into a dragon, and went about slaying and devouring both man and beast. Him Mime sought one day, and said:

“It is in my mind, brother, to send thee the fairest and mightiest youth in all the land that thou mayst devour him.”

Then he went home and bade Siegfried go into the forest to burn some charcoal. This he did, and when he had reached the place whereto Mime had directed him, he felled some trees and built a great fire. Thereupon he slew a boar, ripped off the bristly hide, and was about to roast it before the fire, when of a sudden out from the shadows of the forest sprang a dragon, terrible to behold. Its jaws were so huge that it could have swallowed a horse and rider; fiery sparks shot from its eyes, and steam issued from its nostrils. But Siegfried did not shrink, for he knew not fear. Having no sword, he quickly snatched from the fire a stout sapling and thrust the blazing end between the jaws of the dragon, at the same time smiting its scaly head with such force that the monster's skull was shattered, and blood and bone flew to the tree-tops. The huge reptile rolled upon the ground lashing its tail and striking such terrible blows therewith that the earth trembled and great trees were shaken. Siegfried stood afar till the struggle was over and the monster lay dead; whereupon he struck off the head with his axe and cut out the heart, which he roasted before the fire. Now, it chanced that as the blood dripped therefrom, he dipped his finger in to taste it, but no sooner had he touched his lips with it, than lo! straightway he understood the language of the birds. And this is what they sang:

❧ SIEGFRIED IN THE FORGE ❧

“Thou wast meant the worm to feed;
Mime is thy foe. Take heed!”

Next, Siegfried sought and found the den of the monster, deep in a cleft of rock; and there lay a she-dragon with her young. He flung a tree across, that they might not escape; then he felled more trees, and casting them into the cleft, set fire to them. When the reptiles were consumed there gushed forth from the rock a clear white stream; it was the fat of the dragons. And Siegfried, taking off his garments, smeared his body therewith, all save one spot between the shoulders whereon a linden leaf had chanced to fall. Wherever the dragon's fat touched it the skin seemed to grow more fair and smooth, whereas in truth it had become as impenetrable as the toughest hide. Thereupon Siegfried clothed himself once more and set out on his homeward way, bearing the head of the dragon upon his shoulders; but when Mime's workmen saw him returning, they fled in terror, for they had believed him dead.

Now it chanced that Mime saw none of this for he was at work in the forge, and when Siegfried of a sudden stood in the doorway and cast the dragon's head at his feet he was alarmed and changed color; yet he feigned to be greatly rejoiced over Siegfried's victory and therewith bestowed on him as reward a

costly suit of armor which he had wrought for King Hernit.

Siegfried spoke no word while Mime enveloped him in the armor and girded on the great sword Gram, nor yet when the smith proffered him likewise Grane, the noblest steed in all the world. When Mime had finished, Siegfried upbraided him for his treachery and falseness. Mime denied it fiercely, whereupon the hero drew his sword and struck his head from his shoulders. Then he went to the pasture to seek the horse Grane. No man had ever dared ride this wondrous steed ; but when Siegfried approached, it sprang toward him, neighing joyously, as if to greet at last a worthy master. Whereupon Siegfried mounted and rode away.

Chapter IV

Siegfried and the Nibelungs

FORTH into the great world the young hero fared at last; and one day he chanced to meet with Dietrich of Bern, the same who had vanquished the mighty Ecke, and many valiant deeds thereafter wrought. Against him Siegfried had long yearned to try his strength, wherefore he hailed the champion joyfully and offered him combat; nor was Dietrich averse to this. Long they strove, but no advantage could either gain; whereupon they agreed to a truce, and Dietrich took Siegfried with him to the court of King Etzel. There he abode three years, fighting in many battles for the King and performing such heroic feats that his fame soon spread throughout the land. Then came peace, and his sword being no longer of use, he once more rode upon his way. Through many lands he had wandered, when he came one day to a hill whereon stood a great castle, and near by on the plain was a city.

Now at this time there was great strife within the castle, for the King was dead, and his two sons,

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

Nibelung and Schilbung, were left to share their father's treasure, and each believed the other was seeking to overreach him.

When they learned that Siegfried the famous hero was come, they were overjoyed, and resolved forthwith that he should divide the treasure for them. This Siegfried agreed to, if they would swear to abide by his judgment, and they took an oath so to do, bestowing on him besides the sword Balmung, which was even greater and sharper than his own Gram. Then he set to work and divided the treasure as was just and lawful. But still the King's sons were not content, and notwithstanding their oath the quarrel broke out afresh. Siegfried would have made peace between them once again, but mad with rage and hatred they turned upon him, and at once a terrible fight began. Siegfried had but a handful of followers, while opposed to them were many hundreds, with twelve gigantic warriors at the head; yet soon the ground was strewn with heaps of their slain. So swift and true fell the lightning strokes of Balmung that men were mowed down like grass beneath the sickle. At last the King's two sons were slain; whereupon those who were left alive yielded themselves and hailed Siegfried as their lord.

Thus did Siegfried become King of the land of the Nibelungs (Norway) but another hard struggle

must he undergo, for anon came Alberich, the powerful dwarf who guarded the King's treasure, to avenge the death of Nibelung and Schilbung. This Alberich was but of the stature of a child, yet was he finely formed and magnificently arrayed. For a weapon he carried a whip of seven thongs, each tipped with a golden knob, with which he dealt such fearful blows that no shield or helm, however strong, might withstand them. Well might Siegfried dread to meet so formidable a foe; yet he knew no fear, and no sooner did the dwarf draw nigh than they sprang at each other like two eagles. But lo! of a sudden Alberich vanished before Siegfried's eyes and his spear smote the rocky wall with such force that it broke, sending a great stone crashing to the ground, while at the same instant he received a blow that burst three of the steel rings of his armor. The dwarf had drawn from his pocket and donned the Tarnkappe, or magic cap, that made its wearer invisible.

Siegfried laid about him furiously with Balmung, but Alberich only laughed mockingly; for not once did the great sword touch him, while Siegfried received many a blow that might well have slain a giant. Seeing that if he did not prevent this he must in the end be overcome, he thrust Balmung into the sheath, turned quick as thought and, seizing the dwarf with his hands, succeeded at last, in spite

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

of his struggles, in snatching the magic cap from him. This cap had likewise the power of lending its wearer the strength of twelve men. Moreover, Alberich was now once more visible, wherefore Siegfried again drew his sword and rushed upon his foe. A mighty blow from the whip dashed his shield to pieces, but he soon overpowered the dwarf, who now begged for mercy, and swore allegiance to his conqueror. Thereupon Siegfried granted him his life and bade him continue as guardian of the treasure.

Now, this treasure was a hoard of gold and jewels so vast that a hundred wagons could not have borne it away, nor did it ever grow less, however much might be taken therefrom. With it, moreover, was a magic wand of gold that gave its owner power over all men.

Siegfried did not tarry in his new-found kingdom. When Alberich and all the chief Nibelungs had sworn fealty to him as their liege lord, he bade them farewell and rode homeward to Santen.

There reigned in Burgundy at this time a mighty prince named Günther, who had two brothers, Gernot and Giselher, no less wise in council and brave in battle than himself. Now, these three princes had a sister, a noble damsel as beautiful as the day, and her name was Kriemhild.

One night it chanced that Kriemhild had a strange

dream. Her favorite falcon rose from her hand and soared aloft, whereupon two gray eagles swooped down from the mountain top and struck their sharp talons into its breast, so that it fell dead at her feet. Full of trouble, she awoke and related the dream to her mother, who said : “ May God have thee in His care ! The falcon, meseemeth, is the gallant knight whom one day thou shalt wed.”

But shamed, the maiden answered : “ Never shall I be wife to any man ! ”

Thereupon her mother reproved her, saying : “ Make no rash vows, my daughter ! No greater honor can fall to the lot of any maiden than to be true wife to a noble lord.”

Chapter V

Siegfried goes to Burgundy

NOW for a whole year Siegfried abode at home with his parents, but such were the tales that reached him of the wondrous beauty and grace of Kriemhild that he determined to go to Burgundy and woo her for his wife. His father warned him that the Burgundians were insolent and haughty, and bade him be on his guard against King Günther and his brethren, and most of all to beware of the fierce Hagen of Tronege (Treves), a near kinsman of the King. Whereupon Siegfried boldly declared he feared no man, neither the princes nor their kinsman, and would gladly meet them in combat, one or all. When Siegmund saw that his son's resolve was not to be shaken, he wished to send a thousand knights to accompany him, but this Siegfried refused, nor would he have more than twelve stout warriors, and those of his own choice.

Now when 't was told to Sieglind,
The Queen so fair and mild,



GOES TO BURGUNDY



She sore distressed and troubled was
For her belovèd child ;
For well she knew King Günther's court,
Likewise his stalwart men ;
Wherefore she sought by tears to end
His wooing there and then.

But Siegfried's words at length prevailed over his mother's fears, and she too gave her consent, yet with a heavy heart. Soon all was ready, and Siegfried, with his trusty followers, well armed and equipped, bade a loving farewell to all and set forth upon his journey, followed by many tears and prayers.

The trappings of their prancing steeds
With ruddy gold did shine,
As Siegfried and his gallant knights
Behind them left the Rhine.
So gloriously attired and horsed
Was never martial band,
As they their stately progress made
Into King Günther's land.

On the seventh day they came to Worms, where never before had such mighty heroes been seen. The people in the streets stood and stared to see them pass, and many ran after them ; but Siegfried far surpassed them all in beauty and stature no less than in the splendor of his equipment. Before the King's castle they halted, whereupon serving-men

hastened to assist the strangers to dismount, and provide for their steeds. But Siegfried said :

Let bide the steeds belonging to
Myself and my brave men !
It may be we depart anon
From Burgundy again.
To him who knows and will reply,
In truth will I be bound,
If he will say where now perchance
King Günther may be found.

To this they replied that the King was in the great hall of the castle, and pointed thither. Meanwhile Günther had perceived the well-armed stranger knights from the window, and, greatly wondering thereat, questioned his brothers concerning them ; but none could say who they might be. Then outspoke one of his men :

“ My Lord, were it not well to summon Hagen ? He hath seen many lands, and perchance will have knowledge of these strangers.”

When Hagen came he said : “ Never before, forsooth, have I laid eyes on yon bold heroes ; yet much have I heard of Siegfried, and it may well be he that towers above the rest.”

And Günther replied :

“ Meseemeth thou art right.
Yon dauntless chief of princely air
Is he, that valiant knight !

❧ GOES TO BURGUNDY ❧

That he is bold and high of mind
I long have understood,
Let us go forth to greet our guest —
Now is his coming good ! ”

Though there was none in all Günther's court so haughty as Hagen, yet he did not gainsay this. And the King went out to welcome Siegfried, whereupon that hero challenged him forthwith to mortal combat, whosoever should be the victor to fall heir to the crown and lands of the vanquished. But Hagen feared for the issue of this ; wherefore he spoke soft words to Siegfried, greeting him as friend, not foe, and conducted him to the castle hall, where he drank of the King's wine and was made welcome.

Thus did Siegfried become an honored guest at Günther's court, and long he bided there, beguiling the time with tilting, casting the javelin, stone-throwing, and all manner of knightly sports ; nor was there any that could surpass him in feats of skill and daring. But he saw naught of Kriemhild the fair, though her glances many a time fell upon him :

Full oft upon the tourney field,
Where met in knightly sport
The valorous knights or gallant squires
Of the Burgundian court,
Did Kriemhild from her window gaze,
To see how Siegfried bore
The honors from them all — for this
And naught else cared she more.



To know that on him thus she gazed,
Had rapture been, I ween;
And might his eyes but once behold
The face of her, his Queen,
Then could the earth no greater joy
Or happiness impart
To him who long had held so dear,
Her image in his heart.

Thus Siegfried dwelt in Günther's court
Till full a year had flown,
Nor had these lords of Burgundy
E'er braver champion known;
And yet no sight was him vouchsafed
Of her he loved so well —
That love, wherefrom in after days
Such bliss and woe befell.

Chapter VI

Siegfried makes War against the Saxons

NOW, it came to pass that one day messengers arrived from two powerful Kings, Lendeger of the Saxon land and Lendegast of Denmark, declaring war against Günther, whose dominions they were preparing to lay waste. Thereupon was the King greatly troubled, for the enemy far outnumbered his own men and, moreover, were well armed. He took counsel of Hagen, who bade him secure the aid of Siegfried without delay. But Siegfried had already observed Günther's sorrowful mien, and asked him what lay so heavy on his heart. The King disclosed the cause of his trouble, whereupon Siegfried swore to aid him with all his power, and joyfully hastened to summon his twelve knights to join the thousand Burgundians Günther had assembled, while Hagen, with all his followers, made ready to march with them.

The messengers were released and sent upon their way; but when it was made known to the two Kings that Siegfried was with the Burgundians, gathering

together an army to meet them, they hastily doubled the number of their forces.

Soon thereafter the two hostile armies drew near to each other, and Siegfried rode on before to the top of a hill to learn somewhat of the enemy's strength. Of Danes and Saxons there were full thrice his own number of men, but little did this dismay his bold spirit. Now, while he gazed, there rode forth from the opposite camp King Lendeger, who likewise thought to spy upon his foes. Swift as a whirlwind they rushed to the attack, and casting aside their shattered spears, sprang from their horses. Thick and fast fell the blows of their swords on shield and helm, but soon the Saxon King was sorely hurt and knelt at Siegfried's feet, craving his mercy and yielding himself captive.

Then came thirty of the Saxon knights, who, having observed the combat from afar, dashed to the rescue of their lord; but these also Siegfried overcame after a desperate fight, — all save one, who fled, bearing the evil tidings to his comrades. Thereupon Siegfried rode back with his prisoners and summoned his army to the attack. Pennons waved, shield and armor glittered in the sunlight, while clouds of dust arose, as, shouting their battle-cries, they rushed upon the foe. Then followed such a battle as rarely had been known before, so fiercely and bravely was it fought. Many

a shining helm was dulled, and many a lance splintered, while far and wide the plain was strewn with broken shields and swords. But none could stand before Siegfried. Thrice he broke through the enemy's ranks, hewing bloody gaps wheresoever he rode, and at last he came upon King Lendegast. The sight of Siegfried gave fresh courage to the Danish King, for he burned to avenge his brother. Furiously they sprang at one another, but the first stroke of Balmung shattered the golden shield of Lendegast, while the second clove his armor and bore him to the ground; whereupon he yielded himself likewise, and ordering his banners lowered, sued for peace. The greater part of the Danes and Saxons fled, but there fell into the hands of the victors full five hundred warriors, together with the two Kings, wherewith they joyfully set out on their homeward way.

Now, Siegfried had despatched messengers to bear news of the victory to King Günther; and one of these, being perchance aware that Kriemhild looked not unkindly on the young hero, betook himself straightway to her.

"If thou dost bring me good tidings," cried Kriemhild, "thou shalt have all my gold!"

"In truth, fair lady," replied the messenger, "none hath fought so nobly as my lord Siegfried, nor lives there a hero with fame to equal his!"

Thereupon he told her of the battle, and how Siegfried had vanquished the two Kings and was bringing them captives to the court of Burgundy. At this the maiden's eyes shone like stars, and when the messenger departed she bestowed on him not only the promised gold, but also a suit of rich apparel. And thereafter she stood often at her window, gazing toward the road by which the warriors must return.

Chapter VII

The Festival

AT last Siegfried drew near with his victorious band, and right royally was he welcomed, for in truth he had saved the kingdom. They came laden with spoils of war, and with many a shattered helm, and cloven shield, and many a blood-stained saddle. The royal captives flung themselves on Günther's mercy, but he could not have received them more kindly had they been honored guests instead of conquered foes.

Now, it was in the King's mind to celebrate the victory by a great festival, but his brother Gernot counselled him to delay yet awhile, till the wounds of the prisoners should be healed, so the time was fixed for six weeks thence. So Siegfried took his leave for that space and rode back to Santen, for he greatly longed to see his parents.

At last the six weeks were past and the festival was held with great splendor and rejoicing. The King, as a surprise to Siegfried, whose attachment

for Kriemhild was well known to him, had bidden the ladies of the court to grace the festival with their presence. Accordingly, when the lords and knights had all assembled, making a glittering array of shining armor and gorgeous apparel, the train of damsels entered the hall; whereupon there arose a great pushing and crowding, so desirous were all to behold the beautiful Kriemhild. At last she came, walking at her mother's side and followed by richly dressed and bejewelled damsels and a hundred chosen knights. When Siegfried's eyes fell upon her it was as if the light of morning had broken through the clouds.

Full many a gem on her attire
 Cast dazzling rays of light,
 And on her rose and lily cheek
 The glow of love was bright.
 Whatever minstrel's mind might wish,
 He must admit, I ween,
 That on the earth there never yet
 Was such pure beauty seen.

Like as the silver tinting-moon
 Bedims the starry crowds,
 When, with its clear and gentle light
 It breaks through murky clouds,
 E'en so, in truth, did she outshine
 The best of womankind!
 Such beauteous vision well might raise
 Each hero's heart and mind.

Then Gernot said to the King: "Never yet hath our sister Kriemhild paid greeting to a hero. Methinks it were well she should now welcome Siegfried, for such an honor perchance may bind him to us henceforth."

These words pleased Günther, and he forthwith sent a message to Siegfried, bidding him approach and receive his sister's thanks. Now, when Kriemhild saw the splendid young hero standing before her, her cheeks grew red as the dawn, but with a gracious gesture she gave him her hand and said:

"Thrice welcome, my lord Siegfried !
Thy praises wide resound,
For by thy might were victory
And peace and glory found.
Brave heroes do thee honor ;
The people's love is thine ;
Far more hast thou bestowed on them
Than gold or jewels fine.
Our tottering throne hast thou upheld
And aided by thy deed ;
Now may our country's warmest thanks
And blessings be thy meed !"

They looked into each other's eyes, and there-with a great love sprang up in their hearts, and they knew that never henceforth could they live apart. Then indeed Siegfried's heart beat high with joy.



In Summer and that blithest time,
The genial month of May,
His heart had not so overflowed
As on that festal day,
With gladness and with earthly bliss ;
For she stood by his side
Whom he with all the warmth of youth
Aspired to make his bride.

And now began the great tournament, wherein the conquered Kings and their knights took part, being quite healed of their wounds ; and for twelve days the whole court was given over to feasting and rejoicing.

When all was over, Lendeger and Lendegast came before King Günther, and besought him for their freedom, offering for ransom as much gold as might be borne by five hundred horses. Günther declared this was the due of Siegfried who had vanquished them. But Siegfried cared naught for the gold, and said :

“ Let them go hence in peace, so they will pledge themselves nevermore to make war upon thee ! ”

So Günther bound the two Kings by this pledge, in token whereof they gave him their hands. Then he sent them with all their followers back to their own land, laden with gifts.

Chapter VIII

King Günther's Voyage to Iceland

AT this time wondrous tales were brought to Worms of a beauteous and warlike princess who dwelt in Iceland and was called Brunhild. Many knights had sought her hand, but she chose to remain unwedded. At last, to rid her of those that grew too bold, she set a task for him who would be her lord. In a trial of skill must he meet her, three knightly feats to perform, and win them all ere she would wed, but should he fail in a single one his head must pay the forfeit.

Now, such was her skill in casting the javelin that no knight in all the land could vie with her, while a ponderous stone she could hurl as it were a ball in her hands, and bound after it so quickly as to overtake it ere it fell. Wherefore there was none but lost in the test and therewith his head. Thus did Brunhild think to free herself from wooers, yet still were many bold knights drawn thither by the fame of her beauty, only to perish thereby.

When King Günther heard all this, great was his

desire to win the beautiful warrior-maiden for his wife, and he determined forthwith to try his fortune. Vainly did Siegfried seek to dissuade him, warning him of Brunhild's marvellous strength, but Günther was firm. Moreover, by Hagen's counsel he urged Siegfried to go with him, and aid him in his venture; nor was Siegfried averse to sharing the danger; but first he drew a promise from Günther that should his wooing be successful he would grant him in return the hand of his sister Kriemhild. Thereupon all was made ready for the voyage. Günther would fain have taken with him thirty thousand of his stoutest warriors, but Siegfried warned him that force would avail him little against the stalwart Icelanders. Only in knightly fashion might Brunhild be won. So none went with them save Hagen and his brother Dankwart.

Then Günther and Siegfried betook themselves to Kriemhild, and made known their desire for rich court dresses for themselves and their companions. Kriemhild besought them not to undertake so dangerous a venture, for in her heart was a foreboding of evil; but when she saw it was of no avail she promised them the garments. In seven weeks she, with thirty of her women, prepared four splendid suits of silk and other rich stuffs adorned with costly furs and precious stones.

Meanwhile, a ship had been laden with ample

store of viands and good Rhenish wine, and in this the four gallant knights now embarked with their steeds and armor. The sail was spread, the oars unlocked, and presently a fresh breeze bore them gayly down the Rhine and out into the open sea. But Kriemhild sat at her window watching, till at last they passed from sight and all the world was blotted out by her tears.

Siegfried was the helmsman. On the twelfth day Iceland loomed before them, its lofty towers rising boldly from the mirror-like surface of the water. Now a sudden fancy seized Siegfried, and he told his comrades that not as a king's son would he appear in Iceland, but as vassal to King Günther.

As the ship drew near the mighty castle of Isenstein they saw that the windows were filled with fair damsels; whereupon Siegfried asked the King which of them seemed to him the most beautiful. Günther pointed out the tallest, a stately maiden clad all in purest white, who, Siegfried declared, was no other than Brunhild herself. But anon they all vanished from the windows and hastened to adorn themselves, that they might welcome the knights as was their due. Siegfried, in his part of vassal, led forth from the ship a horse bridled with gold, and held the stirrup for King Günther to mount, and thereafter fetched his own horse and followed. The King's steed and his rider were magnificently decked with gold and

jewels, while behind rode Hagen and his brother Dankwart, clad all in sable and mounted on coal-black horses.

Eighty-six turrets rose above the outer wall of the castle; and within the gates, which stood wide open, could be seen three palaces and a vast hall, built all of green marble. As they rode into the courtyard Brunhild's retainers met them and demanded their weapons; whereat Hagen frowned, nor would he yield up his till Siegfried, who had aforetime been Brunhild's guest, admonished him that such was the custom at her court. Yet was it with bad grace that he obeyed. Meanwhile Brunhild had questioned her followers concerning the strangers; whereupon one said:

"For myself, lady, I know them not. Yet hath yonder stalwart knight a look of Siegfried; the other would seem a King, methinks; the third frowns darkly, as he were of a sullen humor; while the fourth is but a youth, yet frank and courteous withal."

Then Brunhild descended the broad stairs to greet the knights, and following her came a train of a hundred damsels most fair to see, and five hundred knights bearing swords in their hands.

Chapter IX

The Contest

AS Brunhild drew nigh, she greeted Siegfried, saying: "If it is to woo me that thou comest hither, take heed, for peradventure it may cost thee thy life!"

But Siegfried pointed to Günther and replied: "Yonder stands the King of Burgundy, fair Queen, who comes to seek thy hand: as for me, I am but his vassal."

Then Günther stepped forward to urge his suit before the Queen, but no reply would she vouchsafe, save to warn him that he must submit to the trial. Then Siegfried whispered to the King to be of good heart and rely on his aid; but Hagen became furious and defiantly offered to do battle with the Queen on behalf of his lord. Thereupon Brunhild threatened them all with death should the King not prevail; but finding that even this failed to shake their purpose, she commanded that the trial take place without delay. When they had come to the spot she donned a golden coat of mail and over this a silken tabard, edged with costly lace. Seven hundred knights then stepped forth

and formed a circle about them: these were to be the judges of the contest.

Brunhild called for her weapons, whereupon there came four men bearing a golden shield, studded with steel and thickly set with gems even to the strap thereof. This they held while Brunhild, pushing up her sleeve, placed it on her arm, swinging it aloft as though it were but a shadow. Next came the javelin borne by three men. It was huge and heavy and tipped with a keen blade of steel. When Hagen saw the ease with which Brunhild wielded these mighty weapons, he was awed by her well-nigh superhuman strength, and for the first time in his life, fear crept into his heart.

"Would we had never left the Rhine," he thought, "for here shall we surely meet our death!"

And to Dankwart he said: "Were it the devil himself, methinks he must succumb to this woman!"

Even Günther felt his courage sink, while Dankwart, overcome with grief for his lord, whose life he held for lost, exclaimed: "Now, had we but our arms, brother Hagen, with my own hand would I strike down that beauteous she-devil, ere I would see my dear lord slain!"

But Brunhild overheard these words; whereat she looked around with a scornful smile upon her lips, and gave orders that the arms of the two

❧ THE CONTEST ❧

knights should be restored to them. And when Dankwart felt his sword within his grasp once more his face flushed with joy. Now the contest was about to begin, and Günther, well-nigh despairing, stood over against his beauteous adversary when of a sudden he heard a voice in his ear. He could see no one, but the voice said :

“It is I, Siegfried. Have no fear!”

Unobserved, the hero had hastened to the ship and put on the magic cap, which not only made him invisible but gave him the strength of twelve men.

“Do thou make a show of performing the feats,” he whispered to the King, “while I will bear the shield and cast the javelin.”

At these words Günther’s spirits rose. Now the signal was given and Brunhild hurled her spear. Fire flew from the King’s shield as the spear drove clean through it, striking sparks from the mail beneath, and bearing both heroes to the earth. Blood poured from Siegfried’s mouth but they quickly sprang to their feet again, and now was it Siegfried’s turn to cast the javelin, albeit Günther seemed to make the throw. Siegfried had turned the spear about lest the sharp point should wound the Queen. Away it sped, whizzing through the air, and struck her shield with such force that it rang again. Down fell Brunhild, but she rose undaunted and smilingly

praised Günther for his throw, for still was she confident the victory would be hers. Then she called for the stone, whereupon was brought a round stone so huge and massive that twelve men could scarce raise it from the ground. This she lifted, poised a moment, and then flung from her with so powerful an arm that it flew twelve fathoms length; nor was this amazing feat all, for with a mighty bound she sprang after the stone, overleaping it ere it touched the ground. Again Günther lost heart, but when it came to his turn, Siegfried not only cast the stone far beyond Brunhild's mark, but, taking Günther with him, he bounded so quickly after it that he caught it again before it fell.

Brunhild grew red with wrath, but was forced to own herself vanquished; wherefore turning to her courtiers, and with a gesture of the hand toward Günther, she said:

“Now are ye henceforth true lieges to King Günther, one and all!”

Then came all the chiefs to lay their arms at the feet of the King; and after he had saluted Brunhild with courtly words, she bade him repair with her to the marble palace, while Hagen and Dankwart followed to share in the honors of their lord.

But Siegfried had made all speed to the ship to lay aside the cap and now returning, sought the Queen and asked her if the contest would not soon

❧ THE CONTEST ❧

begin. Brunhild confessed that she had lost the wager; whereupon Siegfried said:

“Right joyful news is this, fair Queen! Now of a truth must thou fare with us to the Rhine!”

To this Brunhild made no reply, but she forthwith summoned all her kinsmen and followers to the castle. Then from all quarters there began to assemble so vast a number of knights and warriors that Hagen grew uneasy, and said:

“Methinks this bodeth us no good. Albeit Brunhild’s court hath sworn fealty to our King, yet may her people look upon him as a foe and evil befall us thereby.”

“Thy words are wise,” replied Siegfried. “Now will I go hence and summon to our aid such warriors as never yet hast thou beholden. A thousand mighty champions will I fetch hither; but should any mark my absence, do thou, King Günther, say that thou hast despatched me hence.”

And thereto the King gladly agreed, but bade him return as speedily as might be.

Chapter X

Siegfried Visits the Nibelungs

HASTENING to the ship, Siegfried once more donned the cap and put out to sea. The ship seemed to be moving of itself, for Siegfried was invisible, but urged on by his strong arm and a favoring wind that filled the sails, it sped along so fast that the end of a day and night found him an hundred miles from Iceland. On the second day he came to the shores of the land of the Nibelungs, which he had once conquered and made subject to him. Before the King's castle he landed, and wishing to discover first of all if the treasure was well guarded, knocked at the gate. The porter, who was a giant, asked :

“ Who knocks ? ”

And Siegfried, disguising his voice, replied :
“ One who would fain exchange blows with thee ! ”

Thereupon the giant, seizing his iron staff, rushed forth and attacked Siegfried, who defended himself stoutly, till a mighty blow split his shield Goldrand. Then was he in great peril, yet it



SIEGFRIED vanquishes Alberich

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.

C

L

pleased him well to find such zeal in his service. At last Siegfried smote the giant so that he stumbled and fell; whereupon he quickly seized and bound him.

The clash of arms, however, had reached the ears of Alberich the dwarf, who was guardian of the treasure; and now, clad in helm and shirt of mail, his terrible whip in hand, he sprang upon Siegfried. Thereupon Siegfried grasped him by his long gray beard and soon overpowered him. Then Alberich besought him to spare his life, saying:

“I would gladly own thee master, but I have already sworn faith to another—the mighty Siegfried.”

At this Siegfried made himself known, and releasing the dwarf, said: “In sooth, good Alberich, I did but try thee, to prove thy faith.”

Overjoyed, the dwarf cried: “Now is it indeed meet that such a master should be lord of all the land!”

The giant was set free and well praised for his valor; and thereafter Siegfried bade the dwarf awaken the Nibelungs, for that he had need of a thousand men. Alberich obeyed; and when they heard that Siegfried was come again, they sprang up joyfully and hastened to the lighted hall to greet him. By the next day full thirty thousand had assembled, but of these Siegfried chose but a

thousand of the strongest and bravest, and with them sailed away.

Oft, meantime, did Günther watch anxiously across the sea, when one day, having mounted with Brunhild and all her court to the battlements of the castle, he saw the ships of Siegfried and his Nibelungs approaching. Marvelling greatly, Brunhild asked who might be these strangers whose sails gleamed so white, and whose armor shone so daz- zlingly in the sunlight; and Günther answered joyously :

“Now, forsooth, are these my own bold warriors, come to fetch me home !”

Soon Siegfried strode to shore with the Nibel- ungs and the Queen gave them gracious welcome.

The King was eager to depart, nor did Brunhild gainsay him, but leaving her uncle to rule over Ice- land in her stead, she took leave of her people and sailed away with Günther to Burgundy.

And with her from their native land
 Went many a damsel fair.
 No longer might they seek delay
 Their sovereign's lot to share.
 With bitter tears, farewells they spoke;
 They hasten to the strand,
 For nevermore shall they return
 Unto the fatherland.



SIEGFRIED VISITS



The sails are spread, a favoring gale
Soon speeds them on their track;
Of joyous sports to pass the time
In truth was there no lack.
Yet when bold Iceland's rocky shores
Had passed from sight at last,
What sorrow fills each maiden breast!
Their tears fall thick and fast.

Chapter XI

The Welcome

WHEN they had come once more to land, Siegfried rode on before to proclaim the glad tidings, for much he craved sight of Kriemhild, nor was the maiden's joy less when she again beheld the gallant hero for whose fate she so long had trembled. As a token of her happiness at his safe return she gave him four and twenty golden armlets, set with precious stones, to be divided among his bravest followers.

There was great stir in Worms to prepare for the home-coming of Günther and his bride. The spacious hall was magnificently decorated and set with long tables and benches, for all the lords and knights of the realm were bidden to the feast, while the whole court made ready to go forth to meet the returning company. At the head of the long train rode Kriemhild with her mother, mounted on noble steeds; and after them a hundred ladies of the court, all on white palfreys, richly caparisoned, their bridles gleaming with gold. Each horse was led by a man-at-arms, bearing lance and shield, while the

❧ THE WELCOME ❧

robes of Kriemhild and her women sparkled with gold and jewels. Behind them rode a troop of armed knights. Soon the two trains met, and joyous greetings followed.

Then did the Lady Kriemhild
Advance with modest mien
To where with her attendant maids
Stood Günther's beauteous Queen ;
Deft hands unbinding head gear,
Fresh charms thereby disclose,
And when the twain with love embraced,
What shouts of joy arose !

Then spake in courtly fashion,
Kriemhild, the maiden fair :
"Right cordially we welcome thee ;
Our joy the people share.
For sure your coming to our court
Good will with gladness blends!"
"I thank your courtesy," — replies
Brunhild, and toward her bends.

Gladly the knights beheld the greetings of the two princesses, and much debate was there as to which was the fairer ; but those best versed in womanly beauty declared themselves in favor of Kriemhild.

Forthwith was a tournament held in honor of the bride, the Burgundians on one side, Siegfried with his Nibelungs on the other ; whereby there arose such clouds of dust it seemed the whole earth were

burning, while showers of sparks flew from shield and harness. Silken tents had been raised meanwhile, and thither the noble ladies repaired with the King and his kinsmen and Siegfried, to refresh themselves with a repast, after which the whole company set out for Worms. Along the road as they passed were bands of stout yeomen wrestling or wielding their staves, and Siegfried offered prizes for the most skilful and daring. At last they reached the city and, greeted by strains of music and waving banners, rode into the ancient castle of the King.

Chapter XII

Siegfried strives with Brunhild

NOT long thereafter did Siegfried claim his promise from the king, saying: "Thou hast sworn, so I did aid thee in thy wooing, thy sister Kriemhild should be my wife!"

"Nor will I break my oath!" replied Günther, and straightway sought his sister. When Kriemhild learned that she was to be wedded to Siegfried, she made no demur, but joyfully gave her hand to the young hero who so long had held her heart.

That night there was a great feast in the castle hall and Siegfried with his fair betrothed sat opposite to Günther and his bride, whereat Brunhild wondered greatly. Much it grieved her that the sister of her lord should be given in marriage to a vassal, for as such had Siegfried appeared in Iceland, and presently she began to reproach the King therefor, tears falling from her beautiful eyes. This alarmed Günther, and he sought to soothe her, saying that Siegfried was no vassal, but a great prince like himself, with lands and subjects. Thereupon Brunhild demanded wherefore Siegfried had chosen to appear

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

at her court as Günther's liegeman; but this the King refused to make known to her until some future day, nor would he yield, though more and more she urged him, being now full of curiosity to learn the secret. At last she could bear it no longer, but springing angrily from her seat she left the hall and retired to her own chamber. Thither Günther followed, thinking to appease her and found her in a storm of tears and rage. Again she besought him to tell her the truth, and again he refused, whereupon her fury knew no bounds. Seizing her offending lord, she bound him hand and foot and tied him to an iron hook on the wall, and there, despite all his entreaties, was he forced to stay till the morning. Meanwhile Brunhild slumbered peacefully; but when at daylight the steps of the servitors were heard in the passage without, she loosed him, lest he be brought to shame before them.

As the midday hour approached, the royal couples, attired in all the splendor of their robes of state, repaired to the cathedral, where after holy mass was sung, the coronation took place amid great pomp and rejoicing. Six hundred noble squires were knighted in honor of the day and a grand tournament followed, wherein they had full scope to prove their skill and valor. All were joyous save the King. Perceiving his gloomy and troubled look, Siegfried took him aside and asked the cause of his sadness,

and Günther told how he had spent the night in his wife's chamber. Thereupon Siegfried bade the King take heart and swore so to punish Brunhild that nevermore should she desire to lay hands upon her lord; and forthwith they agreed upon a plan whereby this might be brought about.

That night Brunhild again retired early to her chamber and Günther approached her with courteous words; but she scorned him, stormed as before, and at last threatened to fasten him once more with her girdle if he would not disclose the secret. With that Günther blew out the tapers as a signal to Siegfried, who waited without the door, wearing the magic cap. He entered, and as Brunhild was about to seize her royal spouse, he stepped quickly into Günther's place, nor was she aware in the darkness that Siegfried it was whom she had grasped. Then followed a mighty struggle. Siegfried was violently hurled to the floor, but quickly sprang to his feet again, only to be seized once more by the warrior Queen and crushed between the wall and an oaken press with such giant strength that Günther began to despair for the hero's life. But rage and shame lent new strength to Siegfried; and now, although so terrible was Brunhild's grasp that the blood started from beneath her nails, with a mighty effort he regained his feet and overthrew his formidable adversary, forcing her down till her joints

cracked. Then was she fain to yield and cry for mercy; whereupon Günther, taking Siegfried's place again, drew from his unruly wife a vow to restrain her curiosity till he should see fit to reveal the secret, and to strive against him no more. And thereafter he released her, Siegfried meanwhile having left the room, bearing away with him as spoils of his victory Brunhild's ring and girdle, of which he had possessed himself during the struggle.

After the wedding festivities, which lasted for a space of two weeks, Siegfried made ready to set out with his fair bride for Niderland. Günther and his brothers, out of gratitude for the services Siegfried had rendered them, would have bestowed much land upon him as a dowry for Kriemhild, but this the hero refused, having no wish for reward. At Kriemhild's desire, however, an escort of a thousand knights was granted her, and these she was permitted to choose, whereupon she bespoke Hagen and his men. But Hagen grew very wroth at this. He swore he would be the gift of no man, for his forefathers had ever served the Court of Burgundy, and there would he also bide. No other lord than Günther would he own as liege. The grim knight was forgiven his harsh words, and Kriemhild made other choice; nor was this difficult, for many professed themselves ready to lead the band, among these the Margrave Eckewart.

At last was come the time for Siegfried's departure, and the King rode far upon the way with him. After they had parted with many professions of good-will and friendship, Siegfried sent messengers on before with word to his parents that he was returning with the beautiful Kriemhild to Santen, there to abide thenceforth. Glad news was this indeed to Siegmund and Sieglind, and their hearts were filled with joy.

“Happy am I,” said Siegmund,
“Thus to behold the day
Which sees the beauteous Kriemhild
Enthroned, with us to stay.
With praises of her virtue,
Let all the country ring !
Now shall our dear son Siegfried
Henceforward reign as King.”

Chapter XIII

The Two Queens

ANOTHER wedding festival was held at Santen, even more splendid than that at Worms. King Siegmund made over the crown and kingdom to Siegfried, and in due time a son was born to Kriemhild, whom she named Günther, for her brother. Messengers were sent to Burgundy to announce the joyful event, but at the same time came news to Santen of the birth of a son likewise to King Günther, and him they called Siegfried. And now for Siegfried and Kriemhild ten happy years went by. Great was their love for each other, and much were they beloved, for Siegfried ruled the kingdom wisely and with a mighty arm.

Many times had Brunhild questioned King Günther concerning Siegfried, seeming to marvel greatly that he no longer paid service to his liege; but Günther, though greatly displeased thereat, ever held his peace, nor would he make reply to her words. At length she professed a great desire to see Siegfried and Kriemhild once again, declaring

that Günther as his sovereign might command Siegfried's presence whensoever it pleased him. Günther, foreboding evil, made for excuse the great distance between them, but so strongly did Brunhild urge the matter that at last the King was forced to yield and bid his sister with her lord as guests to Worms.

Now when the Margrave Gere and his thirty men came to the Netherlands, it chanced that King Siegfried was then in the land of the Nibelungs, and thither they sought him, bearing the message from Günther and Brunhild. Supposing the King to be again beset by foes he declared himself ready to set out at once to his relief, but the Margrave made him aware that not to do battle was he bidden, but to celebrate the feast of the equinox about to be held in Worms. Siegfried thereupon took counsel with his chiefs, who deemed it prudent that he should go attended by not less than a thousand knights, while his father, Siegmund, made ready to accompany him with his own band of a hundred warriors.

Laden with costly gifts, the messengers returned to Burgundy with the news that Siegfried would shortly follow. But when Hagen beheld the treasures they brought with them he secretly coveted the Nibelung hoard and longed to see it all in Worms.

Meanwhile Günther had not failed to recall to

Brunhild the loving welcome she had met with from Kriemhild when first she came to Burgundy, and charged her now not to be in any way behind in her greetings to his sister, and Brunhild gave her word thereto. On the appointed day the whole Burgundian court rode forth to meet the expected guests, and right joyous was their welcome. The whole city was given up to feasting and rejoicing, and all went well for eleven days, when a grand tournament was held. It chanced, as the two Queens sat at a window looking on at the jousting, that Kriemhild, rapt in watching Siegfried, exclaimed :

“ Ah ! look thou upon my lord ! So brave and knightly doth he bear him, as were the whole world’s homage but his due.”

This displeased the haughty Brunhild, and she replied scornfully : “ Ay, so indeed, perchance, were thou and he alone upon the earth.”

But Kriemhild, her gaze still fixed on Siegfried, continued : “ How truly noble is my royal spouse ! Methinks among yon chiefs he is so far the first as doth the moon outshine the starry host !”

“ Rare and matchless though he be, forsooth,” returned Brunhild, “ yet is he not so great a King as is my Günther !”

At this Kriemhild’s anger began to rise, and she cried out : “ In no way is Siegfried behind thy lord

❧ THE TWO QUEENS ❧

or any man on earth!" Whereupon Brunhild with an evil glance at Kriemhild declared that Siegfried with his own lips had owned himself vassal to King Günther when they came to Iceland for the wooing. Kriemhild was greatly troubled, yet she answered proudly:

"Were my lord in truth what thou sayest, then methinks it passing strange that he hath paid no tribute to Günther as his liege lord in all these many years."

"By my faith, thou dost presume too much!" cried Brunhild, furiously. "We shall see anon whether thou or I be most deserving homage!"

With this the Queens parted, bitter anger swelling in their breasts.

Chapter XIV

The Queens' Quarrel

WHEN on the next morning Kriemhild repaired with her women to the cathedral, Brunhild was before her, and stood at the door with all her train clad in their costliest robes, whereat the people wondered greatly, for the two Queens were wont to walk side by side in stately procession. Kriemhild was about to ascend the steps when Brunhild in a loud voice bade her stand aside, since it was not seemly that the wife of a vassal should go before the Queen of Burgundy into the house of God. This went to Kriemhild's heart, for she felt the rude speech injured her beloved Siegfried more than herself. Beside herself with anger, she cried out:

"Vassal or no vassal, yet my lord is greater than thine: for know, if thou must, it was he who overcame thee and delivered thee up to Günther!"

At this Brunhild burst into tears, and Kriemhild, not desiring to prolong the quarrel, passed into the church. Brunhild followed, but so filled with burning rage was she that little did she hear of sermon

❧ THE QUEENS' QUARREL ❧

or of song. When the service was ended she awaited Kriemhild at the door and overwhelming her with passionate reproaches, demanded the proof of her words.

Now, Siegfried had given to his wife the ring and girdle he had taken from Brunhild. During the service Kriemhild's anger had cooled, and her wish was to depart in peace; yet since Brunhild would not permit this, but grew more and more violent, in the end Kriemhild drew forth the ring and showed it to her rival, saying: "If thou wilt have the truth, by this token was it Siegfried who did conquer thee!"

"Then, forsooth, hath it been stolen from me!" retorted Brunhild, changing color.

But now Kriemhild also produced the girdle; whereupon Brunhild, wringing her hands, burst into a passion of tears, and both Queens went upon their way.

Hastily summoning Günther, his weeping spouse related to him all that had passed, adding that Siegfried himself must have devised this means of publicly affronting her. Whereupon Günther forthwith sought out Siegfried, and he, knowing naught of the matter, was much disturbed to hear of the quarrel.

Nevertheless, he bade his comrade soothe the anger of Brunhild, and vowed therewith soundly to

reprove his wife for her rash speech. Then was King Günther glad once more, for he loved Siegfried and was loath to be at enmity with him. But all Günther's efforts to make peace were useless. Brunhild refused to be appeased; and when Hagen came to visit her she told him of the insult that had been offered her, protesting that Siegfried alone had been the cause thereof. Whereupon Hagen fell into a terrible passion and swore to avenge his Queen's dishonor.

Then came Giseller, and when he had heard all, he warned Hagen not to be blinded by sudden anger, dwelling on the good-will and favor Siegfried had ever borne the King and all the land. Meanwhile other chiefs came forward, and now Ortwin spoke out, saying:

"An the King so wills, by my hand the traitor shall perish; nor shall his mighty strength avail to save him!"

Yet none was there that found this saying good, save Hagen, the grim. But with crafty words day after day he urged Günther on to revenge, dwelling on the wealth and power that would be his were Siegfried's lands with all the Nibelung treasure to become his own, until at last the temptation grew too strong for the King, and he yielded himself to Hagen's will.

Chapter XV

The Betrayal

HAGEN now bethought him of a plan whereby he might learn from Kriemhild the secret of Siegfried's vulnerable spot. Some of his men donned the garb of foreign messengers and appeared at the court, with a false challenge from Lendeger and Lendegast, the two Kings Siegfried had formerly vanquished. Again Günther wavered in his purpose, at the thought of such treachery toward Siegfried, who had ever been his loyal friend, and of whose innocence moreover he felt sure; but Hagen's evil counsel once more prevailed, and the voice of his conscience was stifled.

Siegfried soon perceived that something was amiss, and questioning Günther as to the cause of his silence and gloom, drew from him that the Saxon and Danish Kings had sworn vengeance and were coming to lay waste the land. Whereupon he avowed himself ready and eager to meet Günther's foes again in battle.

"Do thou bide here," he said, "whilst I with my

eleven hundred chosen knights go forth and chastise this presumptuous pair."

Joyfully the hero made ready to depart, and Hagen, who had declared he would ride with them, went to take leave of Kriemhild. She besought him to be no longer angry with her for the words she had spoken to Brunhild, adding:

"I have been punished enough for my folly in my lord Siegfried's displeasure!"

"All is forgotten, fair lady," replied Hagen. "Nor is it save for love of King Siegfried that I go with him to this war. Should there be aught wherein it may avail, be sure he shall not lack my aid."

Then was Kriemhild overjoyed and began therewith to sound the praises of her lord, dwelling on the love and loyalty he had ever shown toward Burgundy, and her fear lest through his reckless valor he might perchance hazard his life.

Whereupon the wily Hagen answered: "Methinks there can be no danger to thy lord, since he is proof against all harm; yet tell me, I pray thee, if by any chance this be not so, that I may know how best to secure his safety."

At this, Kriemhild opened her heart to Hagen, and having full faith in his honesty and loyalty, confided to him how, when Siegfried had covered himself with the fat of the dragons, a linden leaf

had fallen between his shoulders, leaving one spot wherein he might come to harm. Thereupon she charged him anew to guard Siegfried well, lest in the heat of battle some foe should wound him from the rear. Overjoyed with the success of his strategy, Hagen counselled Kriemhild to mark this spot upon Siegfried's garment, that he might be the better able to shield him, and vowing to bide faithfully at his side in battle, took his leave.

That same evening Kriemhild took the outer garment of her beloved spouse and wrought with finest silk upon it a small red cross—his death mark, alas! for Hagen saw and fixed the spot well in his mind. The next morning, as Siegfried and his well-armed followers were about to set forth, Hagen contrived that other messengers should appear with the news that the two Kings had taken counsel and determined to abandon the war with Burgundy.

"Then have we armed to no purpose!" said Siegfried to Günther, who nevertheless gave him thanks with fair but lying words for his willingness to aid them; and therewith, by Hagen's counsel, he urged Siegfried to go with them to a hunt on the following morning in the Vosges forest, for there it was that Hagen had planned to accomplish his evil purpose.

Chapter XVI

Siegfried's Death

WHEN the morning was come, therefore, Siegfried made him ready for the hunt and went to take leave of Kriemhild. She was full of anxious forebodings. Hagen's grim visage rose before her eyes, and she began to mistrust him and his friendly words. Bitterly now she repented that her love and fear for her husband had led her to reveal his vulnerable spot. Nor did she dare make known to Siegfried what had passed, for he had strictly forbidden her ever to speak thereof. She had spent the night in terror and distress, and evil dreams had haunted her broken slumbers; wherefore she now besought Siegfried with tears to abandon the hunt, clinging to him as if she would never loose her hold.

"I dreamed last night that two wild boars gave thee chase," she cried, "and wounded thee so sorely that the grass was reddened with thy blood. Surely that forebodes two foes that seek thy life. Ah! go not hence, dear lord! I beseech thee, stay!"

❧ SIEGFRIED'S DEATH ❧

Tenderly Siegfried embraced her and sought to calm her fears, and knowing that he had never wrought evil to any man but had ever shown kindness and good-will to all, he said :

“Dispel these idle fears, sweet wife ! All thy kinsmen, methinks, bear me love and favor ; nor is there any that hath cause to do me ill.”

Yet still did Kriemhild weep, saying : “ I dreamed again, and thou didst stand betwixt two lofty mountain peaks that tottered to their fall. And as I gazed they plunged together and thou wast swallowed from my sight. Oh, trust me, lord, some dire evil will surely chance, an thou dost hunt this day ! ”

Alas ! had Kriemhild but confessed to Siegfried all, how different might have been the ending of this tale ! But he kissed away her tears with loving words of comfort and she dared not speak. Once again — for the last time upon earth — he clasped her to his heart and thus they parted. Siegfried, mounting his horse, rode swiftly to the appointed place of meeting.

Cheerily the huntsmen took their way to the Vosges forest, and when they were come thither, Hagen proposed that all should separate, whereby at the end it might be seen which was the best sportsman ; and this, in the secret hope that Siegfried's boldness and daring might cause him to be

slain by some wild beast, for well he knew the plan he had devised was fraught with no small danger to himself.

Siegfried asked only for a single hound to track his game and Günther bestowed on him a well-trained beagle; whereupon he set spurs to his horse and was soon deep in the heart of the forest. Ere-long a huge wild boar crossed his path, and he slew it with his sword; and thereafter a buffalo bull, an elk, four mighty mountain bulls, and a fierce stag fell before his spear. Retainers followed and dragged the game into one heap, while on every side sounded the notes of the hunting horns and the joyous baying of the four-and-twenty hounds.

At length, King Günther wound his golden horn to summon the huntsmen to a repast, and soon all were assembled in a green glade of the forest, where a fire burned brightly and the cooks were preparing a goodly meal of beef and venison. But Siegfried had roused a bear, and resolving for sport to capture it alive had pursued it fast and far. At last the brute sought shelter in a thicket, whereupon Siegfried sprang from his saddle and, after a short struggle, had it fast by the skin of its neck. Then he bound up the jaws with their rows of sharp teeth, wound a cord about the paws, and laying it across his horse, set out to join the huntsmen.

❧ SIEGFRIED'S DEATH ❧

Glorious indeed to look upon was the mighty Siegfried as he rode joyously through the green forest! Lightly he poised the stout, keen-edged hunting-spear, and the good sword Balmung hung downward to his spurs. He wore a silken tunic of black, glittering with gold ornaments and bordered with sable, and a cap of the same fur, while the lining of his quiver was of panther's hide, the odor whereof was held to attract the game. He also carried a long bow of rare workmanship.

When he came to the meeting-place he took the bear from his horse and unbound it; whereupon the beast, seeking to escape, bolted in amongst the pots and kettles and sent the terrified cooks flying hither and thither. Thereupon a great shout arose from the amazed huntsmen; the dogs were loosed and away they all went into the forest in pursuit of the fleeing captive. Clear rang the horns of the hunters, loudly bayed the furious pack; yet their quarry was like to escape them, for none dared use bow or spear lest he should wound the hounds. Whereupon Siegfried bounding forward soon outstripped hounds and huntsmen, and struck the bear dead with his sword. In triumph they bore it back to the fire, and all agreed that to Siegfried should be adjudged the prize. Many indeed who were aware of Hagen's fell design would fain have had him forego the treacherous deed, yet none dared speak

of this to him, for well they knew his vengeful fury.

Soon were the huntsmen seated round the board, and ample justice did they to the goodly viands wherewith it was spread; but Siegfried, looking about for wine, found none at hand. Now, this was part of Hagen's plan, yet he excused himself when Günther questioned him thereon, with the plea that he had erred in naming the place of the hunt and the wine therefore had been sent to the Spessart forest.

Then Siegfried declared he could have wished they were nearer to the Rhine, for the hunt had given him a mighty thirst. Whereupon Hagen, assuming an air of indifference, replied:

"Most noble knight, hard by I know a cool and limpid spring, whose waters may quench thy thirst. Let us go thither."

Those who knew Hagen's meaning shuddered at these words, but Siegfried joyfully agreed. Whereat Hagen said: "Oft have I heard it said, my lord Siegfried, that none can outstrip thee in running. Here is good ground for proof, and I myself will race thee to yon brooklet for a wager!"

"That gladly will I do," replied Siegfried, "and with all my armor on."

Hagen now pointed out the spring and forth they bounded like two panthers over the grassy

❧ SIEGFRIED'S DEATH ❧

plain, all the huntsmen following. Siegfried was the swifter; coming first to the spring he laid aside his sword, bow, and shield, and leaned his spear against a linden tree. Had he but drunk his fill now and taken up his arms once more, all Hagen's base scheming would have been undone, for none had dared to assail the hero armed and on his guard. But restraining his thirst, he waited till Günther as sovereign prince should first have tasted of the spring. The King was third to reach the spot, the others lagging far behind, for upon them had come a sudden fear and trembling. Kneeling by the spring, he drank and thereafter stooped Siegfried also to dip up the clear cold water in his hand. Now was Hagen's time. Swiftly and noiselessly he bore away the hero's sword and bow. Ill indeed had it fared with the false knight had Siegfried marked his act; but little thought had he of such foul plot to reward his loyalty. Seizing the spear, Hagen hurled it with all his force at Siegfried's back, and so well had he marked the spot shown him by the cross Kriemhild had wrought that the weapon pierced deep into the breast of the hero and there remained. The shameful deed was done, and truly never was there crime on all the earth more foul than this.

The red blood spouted from the wound upon

the bow of the assassin, and he fled; for, though wounded to the death, yet was Siegfried terrible in his wrath. Springing to his feet, the hero sought his weapons, but they were gone; whereupon with shield aloft he rushed after Hagen and smote him therewith so powerfully that it burst asunder, scattering a shower of jewels all about. Hagen was stretched upon the ground, and it seemed his end had come. But now the strength fled from Siegfried, a deadly pallor overspread his countenance, and he sank upon the ground, his life blood staining the grass and flowers crimson. Then Hagen arose and drew nigh, his dark features lit with savage joy at the success of his evil work.

Günther, too, approached, and after him came the rest of the huntsmen, and a deathly stillness reigned as all gazed upon the dying hero. At last Siegfried broke the silence. In noble wrath he spoke:

“Ye dastards! to slay me from behind, and this as meed for all the service I have rendered you!”

The glance of the hero, wounded unto death, appalled the stoutest hearts; rough cheeks were wet with tears; and even from Günther's breast was forced a cry of anguish. But Siegfried was not deceived thereby. Clearly now he saw the whole treacherous plot.

❧ SIEGFRIED'S DEATH ❧

"Too late is it now, King Günther of Burgundy, to bewail the evil thou thyself hast wrought; better for thee had it been left undone."

And Hagen with a scornful glance at his comrades cried fiercely: "Fools! Wherefore, then, do ye lament? Is not this an end to all our discontent? Well was it that I had the will to do the deed against your craven counsel!"

Again the hero spoke, although his voice grew faint: "Vaunt not thyself too much my lord, Hagen! Had I but known thee for the base assassin that thou art, thy schemes had been of small avail against me. For naught I grieve save Kriemhild, my true and loving wife, and that my son must one day learn how his sire was foully slain by his nearest kin."

All grew dark before his eyes, yet still his thoughts were with his wife; her name the last upon his lips. "If aught there yet be within thy breast of faith or loyalty," he said to Günther, "then be thou true unto thy sister Kriemhild! My father and my brave knights now, alas, will wait for me in vain. Oh, never yet hath man so basely dealt by his true friend as thou by me!"

Thereupon the death struggle seized him, but it was soon over; his eyes grew dim, and the soul of the mighty Siegfried took its flight.

When they saw that he was dead, they laid his

body on a golden shield upon which to bear it away, and thereafter they took counsel as to what should be done. Some thought it well to say that thieves had slain King Siegfried, but Hagen spoke out boldly, saying:

“I myself will take him back to Worms. It is naught to me if Kriemhild learns 't was by my hand he died. He defamed our Queen, and for that wrong his life has paid the price, forsooth. Little care I for Kriemhild's tears or moans.”

So they waited till the pale moon stood high in the heavens, and then, bearing the corpse of Siegfried, King Günther and his companions once more crossed the Rhine.

Chapter XVII

Kriemhild's Grief

HAGEN had bethought him of a plan to make his terrible revenge complete, by leaving Kriemhild to find the body of her lord before her door. And so it was, for, when at daybreak the bells for matins sounded from the minster spire and Kriemhild awakened her women to go with her to service as was their wont, the chamberlain coming to attend them saw the body without her chamber. Thereupon the door opened and the Queen would have come forth, but the chamberlain, raising his torch to light the passage, warned her to go back, till he should have borne the body thence. But Kriemhild straightway divining what had befallen, uttered a loud shriek and fell senseless to the ground. When she had come to herself again her women sought to calm her, saying the corpse was surely of some stranger knight, but Kriemhild, wringing her hands, cried out:

“Ah no! it is my lord, foully slain by Günther, and Brunhild it was who urged him to the deed!”

Bending over the lifeless form, while the chamberlain lowered his torch, she gently lifted the head and laid it on her knee; and therewith, disfigured as the noble features were, she knew it for her husband.

"Woe is me!" she cried, "by no good sword stroke hath his shield been shattered. 'Twas a murderer's hand that laid my Siegfried low!"

Thereupon she caused the Nibelungs to be awakened and a messenger despatched to Siegmund. The aged King had passed a sleepless night so fearful was he for his son; yet this terrible news he could not credit, but hastened to Kriemhild only to find her in an agony of grief, surrounded by her weeping women. When the Nibelungs came and saw the lifeless body of their King, they cried aloud in bitter wrath and woe, and drawing their swords, would have avenged his death forthwith; but Kriemhild restrained them, and there before them all she took a solemn oath never to rest till she had found the murderer and wrought vengeance upon him for the bloody deed.

Then Siegfried's wounds were washed, his body clothed in costly garments and raised upon a bier, and thereafter borne to the cathedral amid tolling of bells and chanting of hymns, while all the people flocked to look upon the hero and join in bewailing his death. Thither too came Günther and Hagen with a great show of grief and horror, to join the

mourners. But Kriemhild bade her brother cease his lamentations, since but for him her husband then had been alive.

Günther stoutly denied this, and swore that Siegfried had been slain by robbers in the forest; whereupon Kriemhild demanded that he and all his followers should singly approach the bier. Günther and his two brothers strode past it in silence; then came Hagen, and when he stood beside the corpse, lo! the wounds began to bleed afresh. Again Günther maintained that they were innocent, but Kriemhild, fixing her gaze full on Hagen, cried aloud in grief and wrath:

“Now do I know his murderer!”

A great coffin, long and wide, of silver and gold embossed with knobs of steel, was made ready and therein, wrapped in a winding sheet of richest silk, Siegfried's body was laid. For three days and nights it rested in the minster, and Kriemhild watched beside it. She neither ate nor drank, but besought God to have pity on her and let her also die, that she might be laid with her husband in the tomb.

On the third day the funeral rites were held; and when they were ended, Kriemhild caused the coffin lid to be raised, and in an agony of grief embraced the corpse of her beloved and kissed the pale lips for the last time. Swooning she was borne away;

and thereupon, amid tolling of bells and the sobs of the multitude, was the mighty hero laid to rest within the minster vault.

After some days had passed, Siegmund sought Kriemhild and said to her: "Now let us depart to our own land, my daughter; for here methinks we are but unwelcome guests."

But thereon came Gernot and Giselher, the King's two brothers, who were guiltless of the death of Siegfried, and with loving words besought her to abide with them.

For a time Kriemhild hesitated, but the thought of departing from the burial place of her beloved spouse cost her such pangs that at the last she yielded and promised her brothers to remain in Worms. Siegmund bade farewell to none but Kriemhild, and bowed with grief, the aged King and his faithful Nibelungs mounted their steeds and rode away from the land of the Burgundians, never to return.

Chapter XVIII

The Nibelung Hoard

IN a castle hard by the minster, Kriemhild now spent her sorrowful days, mourning her lost husband and going daily to pray beside his tomb. Thus three long years went by and no word did she speak to Günther, nor did she once see Hagen in all that time.

But Hagen never ceased to urge the King to make his peace with her, for in no other way might the Nibelung hoard be brought to Worms; and at last this was brought about by the King's two brothers. At the cost of many tears Kriemhild forgave every one save Hagen, but little for that cared the grim hero. His mind was set upon the treasure which had been Siegfried's marriage gift to his wife. Soon Kriemhild was persuaded to send for it, whereupon Gernot and Giselher with eight thousand men were despatched to the land of the Nibelungs to claim the hoard. Had Alberich, the Dwarf-King, still possessed the magic cap, none could have forced him to give up the treasure; but Siegfried had taken it from him, and he needs must obey

Kriemhild's commands. In four days and nights, twelve wagons going to and fro had transported the great heap of gold and jewels to the ship from its resting-place within the mountain; and thus was the mighty Nibelung hoard, so famed in song and story, brought at last to Worms. There the two princes gave it into Kriemhild's keeping; and so vast was the treasure that it filled whole vaults and towers, nor did it ever grow less however much was taken from it.

After some time had passed, Hagen said to Günther: "Of a truth, the lady Kriemhild doth dispense her riches with an open hand, and therewith bestow great charities, alike to high and low. Ere-long she will gain so many friends and followers that peril may well ensue to ourselves, wherefore, methinks, 't were better far to keep the hoard."

To this Günther replied that the gold was her own, to do with as she would; moreover, he had sworn to do her no more wrong. But Hagen so beset his royal master, offering himself to bear the blame, that at the last Günther yielded, and Hagen thereupon possessed himself of the keys to the treasure.

Now, at this time it chanced that the Burgundians were about to set forth on some warlike expedition, and the youthful Giselher, full of wrath at this fresh injury to his beloved sister, swore to lend her his

❧ THE NIBELUNG HOARD ❧

aid as soon as ever he should return. But Hagen abode in Worms, and, fearing lest the keys should be taken from him, availed himself of the King's absence to bury the hoard beneath the Rhine, hoping thereby to keep it for his own. But not thus had fate decreed. Being well aware that the King's brothers would not easily forgive this bold act, he left the court for a space to wait till their wrath should have cooled.

Thus with new sorrows was Kriemhild oppressed, and still more bitter grew her wrath and hatred toward Hagen. Not content with the murder of Siegfried, he must also take from her the means of aiding the poor and suffering, and this had been the only solace of her darkened life.

5621

Chapter XIX

King Etzel Woos Kriemhild

IN those days there reigned over the Huns a mighty King who was called Etzel (Attila). His royal castle, Etzelburg (now called Ofen), was on the Danube, and his kingdom stretched far beyond the boundaries of what is now known as Hungary. Great was his fame and many were the lands over which he held sway, so that not only had he dukes and margraves as his subjects, but also kings did homage to him. His good Queen Helcha was dead, and such were the tales that reached him of the beauty and virtue of Kriemhild that he resolved to seek her hand; accordingly, Margrave Rüdiger, one of his richest and bravest knights, was sent to lay his suit before her.

When at the end of their long journey Rüdiger and his followers rode into the courtyard of the castle at Worms, none knew him. Hagen was therewith sent for, and he, having many years before lived for a space at Etzel's court, declared the stranger knight to be Rüdiger, and counselled the King to receive him well. Thereupon the margrave

was conducted to the great hall, where Günther gave him kindly welcome, seated him near his own person, and caused wine to be served him from his own flagon. After they had sat for a time Rüdiger arose and made known his errand, namely, that King Etzel desired to make Kriemhild his wife. Günther promised him an answer in three days, and therewith took counsel privately with his brothers and nearest of kin.

All were agreed that it would be well for the King's widowed sister to wed the King of the Huns, save Hagen, who stoutly declared the betrothal should in no wise be permitted, protesting that evil would surely come of it, for Kriemhild would find means to avenge herself upon them. To this Günther replied that Etzel's kingdom was too remote to be a danger to them, and Giselher rebuked Hagen, saying :

“Methinks my sister hath already suffered enough at thy hands. Seek not to thwart what yet perchance may bring her joy !”

Still Hagen maintained that they one day would rue it if they scorned his counsel; but none the less the princes resolved that Kriemhild should make her own choice. The Margrave Gere was sent forthwith to acquaint her with King Etzel's desire. The sorrowing Queen at first deemed it but another plan of Hagen's to mock her grief; but

when Gere assured her that it was no jest, she replied that she had no wish to wed, but sought only to spend her days in mourning her dead lord.

The next day came Rüdiger himself to urge his master's suit. Kriemhild greeted him kindly, but bade him tell King Etzel that none who knew her grief for Siegfried would seek to win her hand. Thereupon Rüdiger sought to tempt her with the wealth and honor that would be hers as the wife of the mighty Etzel, but all in vain; nor were the counsels of her mother and brothers of any avail to move her from her purpose. Still Rüdiger did not despair, but again making plain to her the power she would have as Queen of all the Huns, added significantly :

“Moreover, gracious lady, hadst thou e'er a wrong to be avenged, thou couldst depend on my good sword.”

At these words Kriemhild's hatred against Hagen blazed up more fiercely than before. With flashing eyes she called on Rüdiger to pledge his word thereto; and this he did, little foreseeing in what manner he should one day be called upon to redeem it.

Thereupon Kriemhild consented to become the wife of King Etzel and, bidding farewell to all her kin, departed with Rüdiger for the land of the Huns.

Chapter XX

Etzel's Invitation to G nther

WHEN Etzel learned that Kriemhild was coming, he rode gallantly forth to meet his bride with a long train of knights and courtiers. Kings and dukes were there withal, and banners of many countries waved above the host. For seventeen days the wedding festivities lasted; nor had Kriemhild in all her life seen aught to equal the splendor and magnificence that now surrounded her.

Six years went by. Kriemhild had borne a son who was called Ortlieb, and she was happy at Etzel's court; yet still was she tormented with the thought that Siegfried's murderer yet lived. The theft of the Nibelung hoard she had indeed forgiven, but her deadly wrath at the foul treachery to her beloved husband had known no change.

"Oh, that Hagen were but here!" she often sighed as she cast about her for some means whereby this might be brought to pass; for well she knew that he would never come alone. At last she bethought her of a plan. Seeking the King one day when in a gracious mood, she said to him:

“Most generous lord! one cause of grief and shame have I, in that my kindred never visit me. Methinks it will be said that I came to thee an exile, or that my kin disown me. Wherefore I pray thee, let them be summoned hither as our guests, and thereby wilt thou greatly relieve my troubles.”

King Etzel kindly granted this request and forthwith despatched messengers to Worms to bid the Burgundian princes to the approaching festival of the Summer solstice. Before they departed, however, Kriemhild summoned them to her and charged them to see to it that all her kinsmen came, even to her uncle Hagen; and furthermore, if they should be questioned concerning her, to say that she was well and of good cheer.

Thereupon the messengers set out for Worms. Günther gave them such welcome as befitted the envoys of so powerful a ruler, and much rejoiced was he to hear of Kriemhild's contentment, for now it seemed she had at last forgotten all the past. A council was held, and all were for accepting King Etzel's bidding save Hagen, who grew angry when urged thereto. Casting a black look at Günther, he asked if he had forgotten how Siegfried was slain.

“'T was by my hand he fell, in truth; but thou wast partner to the deed!”

Earnestly he strove to dissuade them from the

journey, pointing out the danger of putting themselves in the power of Kriemhild, whose vengeance never slept. But the princes refused to abide by his counsel, and Giselher, who of all the brothers was best loved by Kriemhild, exclaimed :

“Thou art the guilty one, not we ! An thou dost tremble for thy life, bide here ; but as for us, our wish is that we ride thither without delay.”

Then Hagen urged no more, but made ready to accompany them, since shame it were for him to stay behind. Yet he warned Günther as a safeguard to take with him a thousand of the stoutest champions in the land ; and this he did, leaving Hagen to choose them. And when all were fully armed and ready, they set out on their fateful journey to the land of the Huns.

Chapter XXI

The Swan-Maidens

TOWARD the Main they took their way, Hagen leading, for well he knew the ground. Proudly they rode, a thousand gallant knights, and behind them came full nine thousand stout retainers. On the twelfth morning they came to the Danube and found the river far and near had overflowed its banks; whereat Hagen's brow grew dark, but Günther bade him seek some means of crossing.

"Forsooth," said he, "I care as little as another to meet death within yon waves, for many a Hun I trust shall yet by my hand breathe his last!" Therewith he rode on before to seek a boatman. Well was he armed, with his stout shield and helm and hauberk of polished steel and his heavy two-edged sword buckled to his mail. As he drew near the stream he heard the splashing of water, and looking about saw two nymphs disporting themselves therein, their golden hair floating far behind them, while on the green bank lay their wondrous swan-garments. Hagen stooped quickly and snatched

❧ THE SWAN-MAIDENS ❧

them up, whereupon Hadburg, one of the nymphs (mermaidens), called to him :

“ Sir Hagen bold, so thou return
Our raiment on the spot,
We ’ll tell thee of thy journey’s end,
And what will be thy lot ! ”

This was much to Hagen’s mind, and he agreed thereto. Then the swan-maiden said :

“ With ample safety ye may ride
Into King Etzel’s land :
I pledge on this my truth and troth,
And therewithal my hand,

“ That never noble king’s array
Did win in foreign State,
Such honor and such lofty fame,
Believe — such is your fate. ”

Overjoyed at these words, Hagen restored to the nymphs their strange garments ; and no sooner had they donned them than straightway they became white swans.

Then spake the other water-nymph,
This one Sieglind’s hight :
“ I warn thee, Hagen Tronege,
Sir Adrian’s son of might,

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

“ That to obtain the clothes, my aunt
Has said what is not true :
For shouldst thou journey to the Huns,
That journey thou shalt rue.

“ Turn back again, ye heroes,
There yet is time, I ween ;
For ye to this high festival,
Have only bidden been

“ That ye should thereby perish,
In royal Etzel’s land ;
And all who thither ride,
To death extend the hand ! ”

Then Hagen, seized with fury, cried : “ Now, by my faith, thou liest in thy speech ! No cause is it for all to die that one among us hath incurred deep hate.”

Again the nymph in sorrow spoke :
“ Yet fate hath so declared,
Of all your gallant company
Shall only one be spared —

“ And he, the chaplain of the King,
As we full well do know,
He only, home returning, to
King Günther’s land shall go.”

Then would Hagen hear no more, but asked if there was no ferryman at hand. She told him the

ferryman's house was on the other bank of the Danube, and warned him to be on his guard with the man and speak him fair, or evil might come of it, for he was of wrathful temper and a stout liegeman of the prince to whom the land on that side of the river belonged.

At this Hagen looked scornfully and rode away, but again the Swan-maidens called to him, and bade him call himself Amelrich, for that name would surely bring the boatman. Therewith they arose in the air in their swan-garments and soon had vanished from sight. When Hagen spied the house across the stream he gave a mighty shout which brought the ferryman to the door. Hanging a heavy gold clasp upon the point of his sword, Hagen held it aloft so that it gleamed in the sunlight, and offered it to him, at the same time calling himself Amelrich, whereupon the doughty boatman seized the oars and rowed his boat across the river. No sooner had it touched the bank than Hagen sprang quickly into it, but the man shouted furiously:

"Now hast thou lied to me! Thou art not my brother Amelrich, so on this side mayst thou bide, forsooth!"

Hagen's brow darkened, yet still he sought to speak him fair. "I am a stranger here," he said, "and with me ride a thousand knights and many followers besides. We would fain go on our way,

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

wherefore take this gold and ferry us across the stream."

"My lord hath many enemies," replied the ferryman, "and ill were it for me to fetch armed strangers to his lands. Nay, get thee hence, Sir Knight!"

Still Hagen would not stir; whereupon the ferryman, swinging his oar aloft, smote him so mightily that he fell upon his knee. Quickly the hero sprang to his feet, only to receive a second blow on his helm, which split the oar with a loud crash. Thereupon Hagen grew mad with rage and drawing his sword he struck off the boatman's head. Down it fell into the river and after it he cast the body.

Meanwhile the current had caught the boat and borne it down the stream. Hagen seized the second oar and sought therewith to turn it back, but the current was strong and so powerful were his strokes that the oar broke asunder. Now was he indeed in sorry plight, but cutting a thong from his shield he quickly spliced the oar and gained once more the mastery of the craft.

Soon Günther and his followers perceived the bold mariner coming up the river and joyfully hailed him. But when he reached the bank they looked aghast at the blood in the bottom of the boat. The King cried out:

"Hagen, what hast thou done? Thou hast slain the ferryman."

But Hagen denied it, saying: "Fast to a willow tree I found the boat, and therein was the blood, already spilled."

Then Gernot said: "Methinks no farther are we like to fare, for of what use is the boat without a ferryman?"

Thereupon Hagen declared he would ferry them across himself. Bidding the princes enter the boat and with them as many knights as it would hold, he soon had landed them upon the farther bank; and thus going back and forth, he brought all safely over. The horses were driven into the water, and when they saw their masters on the other side and heard their voices, they gallantly swam the stream. Neighing for joy they climbed the bank, shook the water from their sides and galloped to their masters, who greeted them with kindly words. Nor were any lost, though many were carried far down the stream.

While Hagen was ferrying the men across, his eye fell upon the King's chaplain, and bethinking him of the Swan-maiden's word that he alone of them all was to return to Burgundy, he resolved to bring to naught this part of the prophecy at least. Seizing the priest, he dragged him to the side of the boat and, despite his cries, cast him into the rushing flood. Loudly did the knights protest against this misdeed, but none dared openly to resist the fierce champion. Soon the priest rose to

the surface and clung to the side of the boat, but Hagen with the oar thrust him off, deep under the water ; whereupon, not being able to swim, he gave himself up for lost. But the swift current bore him once more to land, and then, thanking God for his escape, he fled and made his way back to the Rhine.

It was plain to Hagen that all must come to pass as the Swan-maidens had foretold, and when the last man had reached the shore, he seized the heavy iron-tipped oar and smote the bow of the boat so that it broke asunder and presently sank. With wonder and dismay the knights beheld this deed of Hagen's, and one ventured to ask him wherefore he had destroyed the boat that might have served them to cross the stream on their return. Within himself he thought, as we all are doomed to death no more need have we for boats ; but to them he made answer, saying :

“Should any among us be so faint-hearted as to seek to return, he shall find no means thereto, but meet his end ignobly in the waves !”

But none was pleased with this save Volker, a stanch friend of Hagen's. No stouter or more valiant knight was there in all the band than he, and to Hagen he clove most loyally, swearing to abide by him to the end, whatever might betide.

Chapter XXII

Kriembild's Welcome

AFTER Günther and his knights had ridden on again for a space, Hagen made known to them the dark prophecy of the Swan-maidens. Quickly the news spread throughout the host, and many a heart sank, and many a cheek grew pale thereat; yet retreat was no longer possible, for the boat was gone.

Soon they came to the lands of Rüdiger, the margrave, who in former days had wooed Kriembild for King Etzel. Right gladly were they welcomed by that brave and hospitable knight, and they spent three days at his castle in feasting and good cheer. At that time Rüdiger's fair daughter won the heart of Giseler, and her parents willingly gave their consent to the betrothal, promising that the marriage should be celebrated on the return of the Burgundians. Alas! that never was to be.

But now no longer might they tarry, for already messengers had been sent to Etzel to warn him of their approach, and on the fourth morning they

took their leave. Rüdiger bestowed rich gifts upon the princes and their kinsmen, and himself rode with them to the royal castle, Etzelburg, the shining towers whereof soon rose before them. It chanced that Dietrich, the Prince of Bern, who aforetime had slain the mighty Ecke, was then at Etzel's court with the ancient Hildebrand; and fearing some evil to the Burgundians, they rode forth to meet them on their way. Hagen knew the two knights from afar and said to Günther:

"Yonder come Sir Dietrich and Hildebrand; let us dismount and go on foot to meet them!" Whereupon all the knights also dismounted. Dietrich and Hildebrand did the same, and the heroes exchanged friendly greetings. Then Dietrich told them of his fears, warning them that Kriemhild's grief for Siegfried had known no change.

"'T is of small avail to weep for Siegfried," said Hagen, insolently, "since dead he is and dead will he remain, for all her tears."

"Ay, that indeed!" replied Dietrich, with a stern glance at Hagen, "and pity is it, God wot, that King Siegfried lives no more. But Kriemhild's vengeance still doth live; and thereby, much I fear me, evil is in store for you."

Günther started; yet, seeking to allay his fears, he asked: "Are we not here by Etzel's own request? Surely your King would not deal falsely

❧ KRIEMHILD'S WELCOME ❧

by his guests; and Kriemhild long since made peace with us."

But Hagen, wishing to know all the truth, urged Dietrich to speak freely. Whereupon he, taking Günther apart, told him how Kriemhild each morning bewailed the untimely death of Siegfried, with tears and prayers to God for vengeance.

Then out spoke the bold and jovial Volker: "Now, in good sooth, my lords, we must endure those evils that we cannot cure with what grace we can. Let us not dampen our courage with fears for what the future may bring forth!" And therewith they resumed their journey.

When they came to the castle, the gates were flung open and the Huns poured forth in crowds to gaze at the Burgundian heroes with all their glittering train. Many eyes sought Hagen, for well was he known in the land of the Huns as the slayer of Siegfried the mighty; and all were struck with wonder at his massive frame no less than his haughty bearing and fierce aspect. Broad were his chest and shoulders, his black hair slightly tinged with gray, while his bold gaze roved restlessly about from beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

King Etzel, with Kriemhild, stood at the window as the Burgundians on their gayly decked steeds rode into the spacious courtyard. When his eye fell upon Hagen he turned to his courtiers,

demanding: "Who may yon haughty chieftain be?"

"'T is Hagen, son to old Sir Adrian, a bold and wrathful knight, my lord," said one.

"Ha!" cried the King, "'t is little strange I did not know him; for though he once was here at court, yet then forsooth, was he but a careless stripling."

The stranger knights were housed within the castle as became their rank, but for the retainers lodging was prepared in other quarters far removed therefrom. This Kriemhild had planned for her own purposes. Now she went forth to welcome her kinsmen. Giselher, who was guiltless of Siegfried's death, she kissed and embraced fondly, but none other did she greet in this fashion. When Hagen marked this, he tightened the band of his helm and cast a meaning glance at Günther. After she had greeted all, she turned to Hagen, saying:

"Welcome art thou to one who gladly sees thee here. Yet tell me, I pray thee, what hast thou brought me from the Rhine?"

"Now, by my faith," quoth Hagen, "thou art rich in gold and power, and yet dost ask what largess I bring!"

"I desire no gifts of thee," said Kriemhild, coldly. "I want that which is my own. Where

is the treasure that thou didst withhold from me? ”

“In sooth, most potent Queen,” cried Hagen, “’tis many a day since I have seen the hoard. Wouldst thou know the spot where it is hidden? Full deep beneath the broad Rhine was it sunk, and there shall it abide until the Judgment Day! ”

“I knew full well thou wouldst not bring it hither,” continued Kriemhild; “and for it I will hold thee to account; as also for the murder of my noble lord! ”

With a scornful look, Hagen replied: “Now by my faith, this buckler broad, and my coat of mail and two-edged sword beside, are weight enough to carry. In sooth, I nothing else have brought.”

Thereupon Kriemhild declared that no weapons might be worn within the royal hall; but if he would entrust his arms to the care of her retainers, she would see to it that they were well guarded.

“Gramercy!” cried Hagen, “it were an honor far too great — for a Queen to serve as armorer. It must not be. Thou hast my thanks, fair dame; but for my arms, methinks they best were guarded by myself.”

“Ah! now I see,” said Kriemhild, angrily, “it must be thou hast had warning to doubt my faith. Would I but knew who spake such words to thee!”

❧ THE NIBELUNGS · ❧

Whereupon Dietrich of Bern stepped proudly forth and said, "'T was I, O Queen, who warned thy kin, and I do not shame to own it."

At this Kriemhild grew red with shame and anger, and turned away without a word, but cast upon her enemy, as she went, a swift glance of deadly hatred.

Chapter XXIII

The Comrades

HAGEN, seeing Volker not far away, called to him, and together they crossed the courtyard and seated themselves upon a stone bench which faced the Queen's palace hall. Many wondering glances followed the two mighty Burgundian heroes, and soon Kriemhild from her window beheld her foe. Whereupon a passion of grief and rage seized her, and she broke into such bitter weeping that one of her knights drew near and said:

"Most gracious Queen, make known to us what wrong doth grieve thee so, for fain would we avenge it."

"Now, on my faith, thou speakest in good time, Sir Knight; for whoso doth avenge this wrong of mine shall thereby earn my lifelong thanks, and well will I reward him." Then pointing to Hagen, she cried: "'Tis vengeance on yon chief I seek. Most basely did he slay my lord, and for that would I have his life!"

Quickly arming themselves, sixty stout warriors

declared that Hagen and Volker should die forthwith; but Kriemhild restrained them, saying: "Too few are ye to cope with yonder pair. Little ye reckon of Hagen's mighty strength, though somewhat thereof doth his look bespeak. And Volker is yet mightier."

When the Huns heard this they hastened to summon more heroes to their aid, and Kriemhild said to them: "Bide ye here a space, my gallant friends, whilst I place the crown upon my head. I will confront my foe as Queen of Huns and tax him with his crime, that you may hear from his own lips 't was he that did the deed."

When Volker saw the Queen descending the broad stairs followed by a band of heavily armed knights, he said to Hagen: "Why doth the Queen approach with such a train? Methinks they come with no good intent."

"Truly 't is with some purpose," replied Hagen. "Yet were there none save these in the land of the Huns to bar my way, then should I well, in truth, ride safely home again! But tell me, Volker, since we may come to blows, wilt thou faithfully abide by me, as I will pledge my loyal service unto thee?"

"By the mass, I will!" cried Volker, and therewith gave his strong right hand to Hagen. "Aye, though the King and all his host should come

against us, yet would I stand beside thee, nor budge an inch as long as breath remained."

"God prosper thee for such knightly words!" said Hagen. "Now let them come! With Volker fighting by my side, why should I fear?"

As the long train moved slowly across the courtyard, Volker said: "Were it not well to rise and greet the Queen? 'Tis but the custom of the court."

But Hagen answered wrathfully: "Wouldst thou then that I show courtesy to one I hate? Nay, as for that, forsooth, the Huns would think 't was fear that urged me to it. Keep thy seat, an thou dost love me, Volker."

Hereupon Hagen, with intent to wound the Queen in cruel fashion, lifted the great sword, Balmung, which he had borne since Siegfried's death, and laid it across his knees, where Kriemhild's gaze must straightway fall upon it. Upon the hilt there blazed a jewel, green as grass, the sheath was crimson, and the handle all of ruddy gold.

Kriemhild stood before him; and when she saw the sword that her beloved spouse so long had borne, hot tears of anguish overflowed her eyes. Whereat a gleam of savage joy passed over Hagen's face; but Volker drew his sword nearer to him on the bench, and both heroes sat undaunted before

the Queen and all her men. Then Kriemhild demanded haughtily of Hagen how he had dared come thither, knowing what he had done, and furthermore, who had sought his presence.

Whereto Hagen replied: "None, O Queen, did summon me; yet since my master was bidden by thy lord, I also am come as a true liegeman."

Hereupon Kriemhild taxed him openly with the foul deed he had done upon her lord; and Hagen turned upon her fiercely, crying: "What need have we to speak of that? Truly 't was I that slew your Siegfried, nor do I fear to own it. I am here, and any one who pleaseth may seek vengeance on me!"

"Now you have heard!" cried Kriemhild to her Hunnish knights. "He hath confessed the deed that wrought me such deep woe. Deal with him as doth best befit; nor will I question aught thereof."

But as the Huns gazed upon the two mighty champions and listened to Hagen's fierce words, they lost heart, and none would venture to attack them. They looked at one another, and one said: "'T were but certain death to assault these two!"

"Thou speakest truly," added a second, "not for whole castles of ruddy gold would I encounter Hagen! As for the other—his fiery glances bent upon us are enough. I would not care to meet the greetings of his sword."

A third said: "I know Sir Hagen of old; in two and twenty battles I have seen him fight, and many a mother's son in warfare he hath slain. Then he was but a youth, while now he is to stalwart manhood grown, and his frame doth appear as if wrought of iron."

"Naught for his valor would I care," cried yet another; "did he not bear Siegfried's sword, and where keen Balmung once doth strike, a life is ended."

Thus argued the Huns amongst themselves, none daring to provoke the conflict; whereupon Kriemhild in bitter anger and chagrin departed, to devise some other plan, while her warriors slowly dispersed.

"Truly" said Volker, "it is even as thou sayest, friend Hagen: the Queen thirsts for vengeance. Let us to our King, lest he should need us by his side."

Therewith they arose and strode fearlessly through the midst of their foes to the outer courtyard, where they found the Burgundian princes with their knights about to proceed in stately procession to the palace hall to greet the King. Dietrich of Bern walked with Günther, Rüdiger with Giselher, while Hagen and Volker followed on behind; nor from this time were these two comrades ever seen apart. As they entered the hall,

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

King Etzel rose from his golden throne and advanced to meet them with gracious words of welcome. Nor was there aught of guile or falsehood in his soul. With no thought of what was in the heart of his wife or wherefore her kinsmen had been summoned, he rejoiced to see so many noble guests and heroes of renown assembled at his court. Leading them to the festal board, he caused wine and mead to be poured for them in golden cups and right joyously they passed the hours till evening came.

Chapter XXIV

The Minstrel Knight

LOW burned the tapers in the royal hall, and as the midnight hour drew nigh, anxious thoughts arose in the minds of the Burgundians. They longed for morning light to dawn. At last Günther prayed the King that they might be permitted to seek their rest; whereupon Etzel gave orders that they should be shown to their lodgings, and with hearty good-will wished them sound slumbers. As they followed the torch-bearers, the Huns came crowding about them so closely that their way was stopped, but Volker drew his sword and sprang forward, shouting: "Give place! or, by the mass, I'll strike!" and Hagen added: "Be warned in time, ye knights of Kriemhild! If you would have aught with us, come with morning's light and you shall find us ready!"

Thereupon the Huns fell back, and the Burgundians were shown into a wide vaulted hall where ample provisions for their comfort had been made. The beds were decked with gorgeous hangings of

Arabian silk, tapestries from Arras, and coverlets of ermine and rich sable. Yet all this splendor could not avail to banish the dark forebodings that black as night had settled upon the hearts of the Burgundians. To the youthful imagination of Giselher indeed, the sumptuously decked hall seemed to bear the semblance of a tomb, and he cried aloud: "Oh, woe to this hostelry, and woe to the Burgundians, that ever they came to Kriemhild's court!"

Whereupon a deep voice answered: "Dismiss thy fears, Lord Giselher, for I will answer for thy safe repose until the morn."

It was Hagen who spoke, and such cheer did his words bring that all laid them down in peace forthwith to seek their much needed repose. But Volker strode to Hagen's side, saying: "An thou so wilt, I'll keep the watch with thee!"

"God will reward thy loyalty, my gallant friend!" replied Hagen. "I need no help forsooth, yet with thee by my side I could ask naught further. Nor shalt thou fail of thanks one day, if my life be spared."

Then donning their heaviest armor they took their place on the stone stairway without, to guard the door. Now, Volker the bold was well skilled in the minstrel art; not only was he master of sword-play, but also of the sweet-toned viol, from which he was never parted. Fetching it now, he



THE Minstrel and Hagen



❧ THE MINSTREL KNIGHT ❧

seated himself in the arched doorway and began to play. As the wondrous melodies floated on the air, all the joys and sorrows of their past lives seemed to fill once more the hearts of the sleeping heroes. Soft and low, like the rustling of leaves in the evening breeze, the last notes died away, and all was still.

Then Volker exchanged the viol for the shield, and the bow for the sword of battle. Motionless the two knights stood on either side of the high arched doorway, like giant figures cast in bronze. Full dark was it, for few stars crept through the cloudy veil which night had cast like a pall about the weary strangers. Not long after midnight Volker spied the gleam of armor in the distance, and looking more closely, his sharp eyes soon discovered some of Kriemhild's knights lurking in the darkness. Kriemhild had sent them thither with orders to slay Hagen, but spare the other.

Volker pointed them out to his comrade, who whispered: "Be silent now and let them approach. Perchance they will not mark our presence here in the dark shadow. When once they are within our reach, we will smite their helms as they come up the stair, and send them back to Kriemhild in sorry plight."

But when the Hunnish knights had advanced a few steps they perceived the two watchers in the

doorway, whereupon one said: "Now must we forego our purpose. Look, yonder stands the minstrel! His burnished helm gleams with vivid light, and sparks of living flame shoot from his mail. Hagen stands beside him to guard the door. Now of a truth those knights may safely rest for aught of me!" Therewith they stole softly away. Then Volker said: "What thinkest thou, Hagen? Shall I not after them? Gladly would I play a brief tune upon them with my sword-bow!"

"An thou lov'st me, do not so!" rejoined Hagen quickly. "Wert thou sore pressed, then must I hasten to thy aid and leave the door unguarded."

But Volker persisted: "They shall know that we have marked their base intent, and so perchance be brought to shame." Therewith he shouted scornfully: "Wherefore so fully armed at dead of night, O Kriemhild's knights? Is it on highway robbery you are bent?"

But the Huns made no answer; whereupon he cried again in wrath: "Fie upon you, dastard, craven crew, who sought to murder sleeping men! Lay down those swords from hands no longer fit to bear them!"

Thus once again was Kriemhild's purpose brought to naught, and she was forced to devise other measures to gain her ends.

Chapter XXV

The Burgundians go to Mass

SO the night passed, nor did the Huns again show themselves. "My armor grows chilly," said Volker, at last, "methinks the fresh breeze betokens day is near." And the two sentinels went within to awaken the sleepers.

Soon thereafter the beams of the rising sun shone into the hall, the bell for matins sounded, and Hagen summoned the Burgundians to go to mass. The knights were about to array themselves in festival attire, but he bade them don their armor instead, change their silk garments for hauberks, rich mantles for shields, and jewelled caps for good steel helms; for strife would surely come ere set of sun and they must be prepared.

"Now go ye to the minster church,
Your sins there to confess;
And pray to God right earnestly,
For aid in our distress.
For of a surety I do say,
Ye heroes without fear,
Unless the God above will save,
No masses more ye 'll hear."

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

So it was that clad in full armor the Burgundians took their way in procession to the minster. When they were come to the churchyard, Hagen said: "Hearken to my counsel, knights and princes! We must be ever on our guard against the Huns, wherefore it were well to keep in close array. Place your shields before you, and should any chance to offer evil greeting, see that his death stroke be your thanks. If our courage fail not, our knightly honor shall yet remain unstained, though all beside be lost!" Thus man to man they stood, while Hagen and Volker advanced to the church door that they might thence keep watch of Kriemhild and her men.

Soon came Etzel in all the splendor of his royal robes, his beauteous wife Kriemhild at his side, followed by a glittering train of knights, and not a little surprised was he to behold the Burgundians armed from head to heel. Still unaware of the dark storm-clouds hourly gathering thicker and heavier above the heads of his guests, he was troubled at this sight, for it seemed that they misdoubted his good faith; wherefore, seeing Hagen, he sought to learn from him the cause thereof.

"Have any dealt you ill?" he asked; "if so, then dearly shall they rue it!"

Now was Kriemhild stricken with terror lest Hagen should betray her to the King; but far too

❧ BURGUNDIANS GO TO MASS ❧

proud was the hero to seek help from Etzel and thereby own he lacked the courage to defend himself. So he replied: "Naught has befallen us, O King. 'T is but a custom we of Burgundy have, to go full armed for three days during every feast."

Nor yet did Kriemhild reveal the truth to Etzel, fearing he would forbid her vengeful purpose, and thus her mortal enemy would once more escape her. So they passed on, and behind them came Kriemhild's knights in spreading ranks. Neither Hagen nor Volker would stir a handbreadth from the path, and thereby ensued great crowding and jostling. The Huns would fain have provoked a conflict, but they feared the King's wrath; and presently all had passed into the church, the Burgundians following last of all.

Chapter XXVI

The Feast

AT midday all were summoned to the royal feast, and the Huns likewise appeared in full armor, whereat King Etzel's wrath arose. Whosoever deemed it fit to sit at feast in arms, him should he not gainsay, he said, but woe unto any who should hold designs against his guests! During the feast Kriemhild left the hall and summoning the prince of Bern and his lion-hearted old warrior, Hildebrand, to her, spoke with them privately. Bitterly she complained of all her wrongs and besought them to avenge her. But Hildebrand said: "No evil would I do the knights of Burgundy for all the gold that one could offer me!"

And Dietrich added: "King Günther's kin never wronged or injured me; wherefore my dishonor were great did I now seek to stir up strife with them."

Therewith they returned to the hall, and Kriemhild sent for Blödelin, the brother of the King, and with passionate words urged him to vengeance

against the traitor who had done her such foul wrong; but as Etzel had made it plain that he held the Burgundians as his friends, Blödelin feared to incur his wrath. Thereupon Kriemhild promised him much silver and gold and likewise the hand of a fair dame, the widow of Sir Nudung, for whom he long had sighed, and when she added thereto the gift of rich lands, at last he yielded and swore to do her will in all things.

“Now, by my faith, that false Hagen shall pay for all thy wrongs!” he cried, “nor will I rest till I have brought him to thy feet!”

Joyfully Kriemhild returned to the hall and seated herself once more beside her lord. But Blödelin went forthwith to his followers and bade them arm, which they did right willingly, for secretly they hated the Burgundians. Kriemhild in her vengeful fury had bethought her of yet another plan, and this was to cause her son Ortlieb to be brought to her.

“Surely,” she thought, “will Hagen say evil words about the child to excite my wrath and thus affront my husband and his Hunnish kin, whereby strife will ensue.” Accordingly, four of Etzel’s knights were despatched to fetch the young prince thither, whereat the King was greatly pleased. Taking the boy by the hand, he said:

“My friends, behold my only son! I commend

him to your affection. Should he grow to be like his kin, I shall have in him a bold and stalwart hero, worthy in truth to wear my crown and fill his high estate; for many a duke and king will one day do him homage. Take him with you, I pray, unto your court, that he may gain all knightly virtues there in return for which will I give you hearty thanks!”

Hagen replied: “If he lives to grow to man’s estate, full many an honor well may be his; but as to that, methinks I see an early death imprinted on his brow!”

At these words terror seized the Burgundians, who gladly would have had them left unsaid, but Etzel gazed before him with a troubled look, and spoke no word. Little did he surmise the frightful thought in Hagen’s mind.

Chapter XXVII

Blödelin and Dankwart

NOW, the charge of the Burgundian following had been given to Dankwart, the brother of Hagen, the same who in former days had journeyed to Iceland for the wooing of Brunhild; and Blödelin's plan was to overpower them first, and then attack the princes and their knights. Accordingly he sought that remote part of the castle wherein they had been lodged, and asked for Dankwart. He was shown into a hall where that hero with all his men was seated at the board, and from the window of which he had marked the approach of the band of armed Huns. Greeting Blödelin with fair words, he asked what brought him thither. "Nay, spare thy greetings," said Blödelin, coldly, "I come not in peace, Sir Knight, but in good sooth to hold thee to account for thy brother Hagen's murder of the noble Siegfried."

"By my faith," said Dankwart, "then would thy vengeance overtake the guiltless, since I, as it chanced, did abide at the royal court when Siegfried met his death beside the spring."

“What thou hast done concerns me naught,” replied Blödelin, “it is enough that ’t was thy kinsman did the deed; and therefore must thou die!”

“Gramercy!” quoth Dankwart, “methinks ’t were well I had spared my words”; and springing from his seat he swung his sword aloft and at one blow swept Blödelin’s head from his shoulders, shouting: “Be this my marriage gift unto thy bride!” For he had learned from a friendly Hun of Kriemhild’s promise to Blödelin.

When the Huns saw their leader fall they burst into the hall with howls of vengeance. Dankwart shouted to his men to defend themselves to the death and therewith began a terrible conflict. Those of the Burgundians who had no swords made weapons of whatever came to hand, but the greater part were well armed, and so fiercely did they fight that soon the Huns were driven from the hall leaving more than a hundred of their dead upon the floor and in the passage. But anon came fresh bands of armed Huns, gathering from all quarters and in such numbers, that their onslaught could not long be withstood. Bravely as they fought, the Burgundians at last were all slain save Dankwart. Alone he stood and shouted: “Behold, ye Huns! of all my men I only am yet alive! If you are true knights, yield me passage to the open air, that I may once more cool my brow before I fall.”

But the Huns would not give way for him ; whereupon Dankwart laid about him so fiercely that soon he made his way to the door and succeeded in gaining the courtyard.

“ Now would to God,” he cried, cleaving a pathway before him step by step, “ some messenger were near to warn my brother Hagen of my need ! ”

Whereon the Huns shouted : “ Thou thyself shalt be the messenger when we shall fetch thee dead into the royal hall ! Then shall Etzel learn that thou hast slain his brother Blödelin and with him his liegemen ! ”

But Dankwart scorned their threats. “ By the mass, I ’ll bear the news myself while yet I live ! ” he cried ; “ I ’ll stain many a Hunnish helm with gore ! ” So furiously did he spring upon his foes that they fell back before him and no longer dared meet him at sword’s length, but hurled their javelins at him from afar. His shield was soon so thickly pierced with spears that he could not bear the weight thereof, and so cast it off. Then they ventured again to approach ; but he smote so fiercely and truly that none who came against him returned. Ever nearer and nearer he made his way to the royal hall. At last, weary and breathless, the hero reached the palace. The terrified servants let fall the cups and dishes that they bore, and would have hastened to the hall

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

to tell the tale. But Dankwart cried: "Stay, varlets! your task is but to carry wine and food unto the feast! I will bear the news unto the King!" Some among them sought to bar his passage, but again his good sword marked a path. Springing up the stairs, of a sudden the hero appeared in the doorway of the vast hall where the Burgundians ate at table with the Huns.

Just at this moment it was that Hagen said the young prince bore the marks of an early death.

Chapter XXVIII

The Strife in the Hall

L OUD rang bold Dankwart's lusty tones
Throughout the lofty hall:
"My brother Hagen sits too long
In peace and ease withal!
To thee and to our God above,
I tell my tale of pain:
My knights and all our followers
Have been at quarters slain!"

With one accord the knights sprang to their feet, their swords flashing aloft, and Hagen cried fiercely: "By Heaven! who hath done this slaughter?"

"Sir Blödelin and his men," answered Dankwart; "yet dearly hath he paid therefor; with mine own hand I slew him."

"It was more honor than he merited, thus to meet his death by a hero's hand."

Now was Hagen's resolution taken, and he shouted: "Do thou, Dankwart, guard the door, nor suffer any Hun to leave the hall, while I hold a reckoning with these."

Then springing to Kriemhild's side, he cried:

“Now let us drink to Siegfried’s repose! For that, we need the King’s own wine!” Therewith he struck off the head of the little prince. Then lifting Balmung with both hands, he slew the attendant of the prince, and a third stroke severed the right hand of the minstrel Werbel, who had borne King Etzel’s message to the Burgundians. Volker sprang to his side, and there began among the Hunnish knights “a slaughter grim and great.”

King Günther and his brothers sought at first to check the strife, but all in vain. Then they too were seized with the fury of battle, and soon all the Burgundians had joined the fray.

Meanwhile the Huns had drawn their swords and were bravely striving to defend themselves. Everywhere through the hall rose the clash of arms, and hoarse battle-cries reëchoed from the roof. From without more Huns hurled themselves against the door, eager to aid their comrades within; and Dankwart, hard pressed, was fain to cry to Hagen for aid. Whereupon that hero shouted in a voice of thunder: “Friend Volker, haste thee to my brother’s side, or we surely must lose a mighty champion!”

Gladly sprang Volker to the door; and now so fiercely did they ply their blades that no man lived to pass within or out.

❧ THE STRIFE IN THE HALL ❧

Joyous above the battle din
The minstrel's shout rang clear ;
"The hall is now well closed, forsooth,
Good comrades, be of cheer !
King Etzel's door is faster made
By Burgund heroes twain
Than if a thousand bolts were shot
To make all entry vain !"

Whereat Hagen flung his shield upon his back, and again grasping Balmung with both hands, laid about him more furiously than before. Fear came upon Kriemhild, for she saw that the Burgundians were stronger than the Huns; and turning in terror to Dietrich of Bern, who stood near, she besought him to aid her to escape.

"But how may that be done, O Queen," replied he. "So mad with fury are these heroes that even I must fight for my life."

But Kriemhild pressed him so sorely in her fear that at length Dietrich promised he would seek to save her; and leaping upon a table, he gave a mighty shout. Clearly above the clash of arms it sounded like the blast of a battle horn. It caught King Günther's ear, and knowing it for Dietrich's voice, he commanded the strife to cease till he should learn the will of the hero, who made signal with his hand that he would speak. For a space there was silence while Günther asked whether Dietrich or any of his knights had suffered ill.

“Loath were I, noble knight, that such should chance,” said he, “for surely no cause for strife lies ’twixt us two.”

Dietrich replied that no evil had befallen them ; he did but seek permission to withdraw with all his men. This Günther gladly granted, whereupon Dietrich, taking the Queen on one arm and King Etzel on the other, retired from the hall, followed by his knights ; but no Huns were permitted to depart with them. Then Rüdiger, who had welcomed the Burgundians so hospitably on their way thither, also sprang upon the table and asked if no others might pass out. And Giselher, who was betrothed to Rüdiger’s daughter, cried :

“Naught is there but peace between us, gallant Rüdiger, for thou hast ever kept true faith with us and never sought to do us harm.”

So Rüdiger with his followers also departed from the hall in peace. A Hunnish knight had sought to slip out unseen behind the King, but Volker swiftly smote him dead upon the spot. When King Etzel was once more without he stood and cried aloud in grief :

“Now woe unto this peaceful feast !
 And woe unto this day !
 For there within is one doth rage
 Like wild boar brought to bay.
 This devil fierce is Volker hight

❧ THE STRIFE IN THE HALL ❧

A minstrel knight is he.
Thanks be to God that by his grace
I now in safety be !
His fearful melodies ring out
O'er all the din and strife ;
His viol bow is crimson red ;
Full many a hero's life
Doth answer to its mighty tones.
Howe'er his wrath began,
Sure ne'er had I so dread a guest
As this same minstrelman."

And now fiercer and fiercer raged the strife. The Burgundians showed no mercy. When the last Hun was dead, the victors laid down their arms and sat them down to draw breath, while Hagen and Volker with drawn swords kept guard before the door.

Chapter XXIX

Iring's Fight with Hagen

PRESENTLY Giselher spoke: "Not yet, methinks, dear comrades, are our labors ended, and many hours of warfare lie before us ere we shall be overcome. But these dead Huns greatly encumber us, wherefore let us cast them out!" Hagen smiled grimly when he heard the young prince's words, for they pleased him well.

Thereupon they seized the dead warriors and flung them out. Etzel came to gaze upon the dead, and Hagen, seeing him, cried out: "It were well, methinks, O King of Huns, an thou didst wield the sword and cheer thy people on, for they lack somewhat of heart! Behold the work the blade of our ruler hath wrought on helm and shield!"

At these words Etzel's brow grew red with wrath and shame, and he called for his arms; but Kriemhild cried: "Nay, venture not thy life, dear lord! Thy single arm were of small avail against yon heroes. Rather heap thy shield with ruddy gold as a prize to those Huns who will maintain the strife." But Etzel was no craven knight, and would have

gone to do battle with Hagen had not his lords withheld him by force.

Then Hagen taunted the Queen with scornful words till her wrath against him rose hotter and fiercer than before, and she cried to the Huns: "On him who slayeth yon knight I will bestow the King's shield piled up with gold, and many a castle and fruitful field besides."

But none stirred; whereupon Volker mocked them, saying 't were shame in them to eat the King's bread, since none had courage to do his will, nor could such dastards hope to gain their lord's esteem, but must hold themselves disgraced as knights forsworn. The bravest of the Huns felt bitter shame within them at the truth of Volker's words, and were roused to fresh fury; yet none dared lead the attack. But there chanced to be a strange knight at the court,—the Margrave Iring of Denmark,—and he now stepped forth, saying: "I ever have been bent on glorious deeds, nor will I fail now to strive for such. Wherefore, Sir Hagen, arm thyself to meet me."

Hagen sought to dissuade him from his purpose, but Iring replied:

"I have encountered great odds heretofore, and will not fail to meet them now"; and therewith he donned his armor. Then Irnfried of Thuringia, a valiant youth, and stout Hawart of Denmark, made ready to aid him with their followers.

When Volker saw the band of armed men advancing with the three knights at their head, he said: "Now, of a truth, friend Hagen, doth not a falsehood ill become a gallant knight? I thought yon boastful Iring would have dared a single combat with thee, and now behold, how well supported he comes!"

But Iring, hearing this, replied, 't was not his wont to stain his knightly honor thus, and what he vowed he would now fulfil. Whereupon his men stood still and reluctantly allowed him to advance alone to meet his foe.

Raising aloft their well-poised javelins, the two champions hurled them at each other with such mighty force and so true an aim that both shields were pierced and the shafts snapped short, whereupon they rushed together, their great swords clanging sharply on the iron shields. So heavy were Sir Iring's strokes that fire leaped out beneath them, and the clash of arms resounded through the hall, yet of no avail were they against Hagen's strength and skill; whereupon, giving over the attempt, he fell upon Günther; and then again baffled, upon Gernot. At last, in a fury at finding himself no match for these heroes he sprang at one of the Burgundian knights and slew him and thereafter three others.

Now Giselher, beside himself with rage, longed for vengeance, nor did he long in vain, for therewith

❧ IRING'S FIGHT ❧

Iring rushed upon him, but Giseller smote him so powerfully that he fell senseless to the floor. All thought him dead, yet he was but stunned with the crashing blow upon his helm; and suddenly springing to his feet he rushed from the hall, smiting Hagen as he reached the door, and wounding him. Furious with rage, that hero grasped his sword in both hands and pursued Sir Iring down the stairs, striking sparks from his upraised shield.

Kriemhild, seeing the blood on Hagen's helm, greeted Iring joyfully; but Hagen shouted to her to save her thanks until the knight should have proved himself worthy of them by returning again to the combat, warning her also that his wound was but slight and had done him little harm as she should soon learn. Thereupon Iring caused a new shield to be brought, and hastily donning fresh armor he rushed again to the stairway. Like a raging lion, down sprang Hagen to meet him, striking such fearful blows that naught could long withstand them. Soon they shore through shield and helm and wounded Iring. Higher he raised his shield to guard his head, when Hagen, seizing a spear that lay upon the ground, hurled it through the shield and fatally pierced him. Back fled Iring to his Danes and there sank dying at their feet, while they crowded about him with cries of sorrow. Kriemhild too bent over him weeping. He died

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

like a hero; yet ere his eyes grew dim he spoke once more in warning to his followers:

“ Those largesses which Etzel’s Queen
Did promise you to-day
Ne’er hope to conquer or to win
While holding mortal breath;
For he who fights with Hagen bold
Is sure to meet with death ! ”

Maddened with grief and rage by the death of their chief, Irnfried and Hawart rushed headlong on the Burgundians and another fierce fight began. Soon Irnfried fell by Volker’s sword, and Hawart by Hagen’s. Then Volker ordered that their followers who were storming at the door be admitted to the hall, and again the din of battle rose more frightful than before. The Burgundians fought like lions; nor, fiercely as the Danes and Thuringians strove to avenge their lords, did one escape the swords of Günther’s dauntless heroes.

Volker, the minstrel knight, took his place by the palace door to watch for any new foe, but there were none who dared attack them. The Huns lacked courage, while Dietrich of Bern, and Rüdiger, who had bold knights at their command, not only shunned the strife but bitterly lamented that it had ever occurred.

Chapter XXX

The Night of Terror

NOT long were the Burgundians to enjoy repose, however, for fresh bodies of Huns came pouring in from all sides, and soon Etzel and Kriemhild had mustered another force ; nor was it easy to repel them, by reason of their great numbers.

The onslaught and defence did last
Till hindered by the night.
Those dauntless guests beyond all praise
With Etzel's men did fight
The whole of one long Summer's day —
So do the legends tell —
Hella! what thousands of brave men
By Burgund weapons fell.

Thus night came on, and gladly would the war-worn heroes have sought a speedy death. Their thoughts also turned toward peace, and they made known to the Huns that they would have speech with the King. Word was sent to Etzel, and he forthwith appeared, with Kriemhild, before the

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

palace, upon the stairway of which stood the three princes in their blood-stained armor, and behind them Hagen and Volker and Dankwart.

Then Etzel spoke: "What would ye have with me? 'T were vain to sue for peace, for never so long as I have breath shall it be granted to those who so cruelly have slain my only child and many of my kin!"

Günther answered that it had been forced upon them, while Giseler, turning to the Huns, cried out:

"What charge against me do ye bring? Did I not come hither in all peace and friendship to your land?"

The knights replied: "Already hath such friendship cost us dear! Full many a widowed wife and orphaned child have bitter cause to wish thou ne'er hadst left the Rhine!"

Again Günther sought to make peace; but Etzel would hear naught thereof. "Your griefs are not as mine," he said, "for to my loss is added shame; nor may it be effaced save with your blood. Wherefore, I say, not one of you shall depart hence with his life!"

Then said the youthful Giseler:

"O beauteous sister mine,
I little treachery feared when thou
Didst bid me cross the Rhine.

❧ THE NIGHT OF TERROR ❧

“To thee I’ve ever faithful been,
Nor grief nor sorrow wrought,
Believing that thou heldst me dear,
To bring thee joy I sought.
Nor can I think thou’lt wish me ill;
Be still my sister true!
With kindly judgment look on us,
Sure less thou canst not do.”

Once more a ray of love warmed Kriemhild’s sorely wounded heart, and she replied:

“Now if Sir Hagen you’ll agree
Into my hands to give,
Then will I not refuse to grant
That ye three all shall live;
Since ye in truth my brethren are
And from one mother spring,
Of further mercy I’ll consult
With those about the King.”

“Now, Heaven forbid!” cried Gernot. “Far rather death than such disloyalty!”

And Giselher said: “Never yet did I break faith with comrade, nor will I fail to-day in knightly duty.”

Thus was the last spark of affection extinguished in Kriemhild’s bosom. She no longer felt pity even for her own kin, since they had refused to deliver over to her the slayer of her Siegfried and her child. Summoning the Huns, she bade them fire the palace on all sides.

Now was it in truth a night of terror for the Burgundians. Blazing shafts flew on to the roof, and soon it was wrapped in flame. Thick smoke and fiery vapors filled the hall, and the heroes suffered tortures. Gladly would they have welcomed a swift death in battle. Many called on God to pity their distress, and one knight cried out woefully for a drop of water. Hagen shouted: "Keep to the walls, my comrades, and raise your shields aloft!"

And still that dauntless hero, with the brave Volker, kept unceasing watch before the door. At daybreak Volker said to Hagen: "Let us within, and then perchance the watchful Huns will think we have perished."

And so in truth did Etzel and Queen Kriemhild now believe. Yet still six hundred of them were alive. When this news was brought to Kriemhild she caused a great store of gold to be brought and divided among the Huns, with which to spur their valor. Thereupon a thousand of the boldest rushed to the assault; but though many of the Burgundians too were slain, not one of Kriemhild's warriors came forth from that dread hall of death to claim his gold.

Chapter XXXI

The Margrave Rüdiger

SOON thereafter came Sir Rüdiger, and when he beheld the smoking, roofless palace, so filled with sorrow was his noble heart at all the evil wrought and yet to come, that tears fell from his eyes and trickled down his long gray beard. Hoping that something might yet be done to bring about a reconciliation, he sent a message to Dietrich of Bern, saying : " Let us go together unto the King ; perchance we may prevail upon him to forego his wrath."

But Dietrich, who also deeply lamented what had befallen, sent back word that it was useless, for Etzel would not hear of peace on any terms, nor might any venture now to speak thereof to him. As Rüdiger stood leaning on his sword, his mournful gaze fixed upon the Queen, a Hunnish knight observed him and said scornfully to Kriemhild : " See, yonder stands Sir Rüdiger ! Etzel hath shown favor to him and richly dowered him with lands and gold, yet hath he not struck a blow in all this strife ! Renowned is he for skill and valor. Methinks such

fame can be of little worth since we have not seen him display either here."

Rüdiger overheard these words and was seized with a mighty wrath thereat. Clinching his fist he smote the insolent scoffer with such giant force that he dropped lifeless at his feet.

At that same moment Etzel appeared in the courtyard. "How now, Sir Knight?" he cried, "that is an evil deed of thine. Are there not dead enough, forsooth, that thou shouldst seek to add to them?"

The Queen too was about to reproach him bitterly, when suddenly she bethought her of the vow Rüdiger made to her when he came to Worms to urge King Etzel's suit. "Bethink thee of thy oath, Sir Rüdiger," she cried, solemnly. "Didst thou not swear to serve me loyally and faithfully to avenge all my wrongs?"

"That did I truly, most noble lady," replied Rüdiger, "nor would I fail to risk my life in thy cause. But 't is my soul that I should lose were I to be at strife with these thy guests, for 't was as friends I brought them hither to thy court!"

Yet still the Queen demanded vengeance on her foes, and Etzel thereto joined his prayers, till Rüdiger in bitter anguish cried :

" Oh, woe is me, forsaken one,

That ever I was born !

Oh, woe 's the day, that I must be

Of all my honor shorn !

THE MARGRAVE RÜDIGER

Of truth and gentleness of mind
Which God to me did give.
Oh, God ! that I might only die !
I fain would cease to live.

“ Whichever duty I avoid,
The other to fulfil,
I ’m counted dastardly and base,
A worker-out of ill;
Yet leave I both of them undone,
I with the world have strife.
May He vouchsafe to counsel me,
Who first did give me life ! ”

He besought the King to take back all the lands and honors that he held in fee, and let him retire with his followers to his castle, a poor man, rather than force him to attack the friends whom he had welcomed in all love and loyalty, who had slept beneath his roof, and to one of whom indeed his daughter was betrothed. But he pleaded in vain, for Kriemhild firmly held him to his word, while the King promised him still greater riches and honor if he would rid him of his foes.

At last Rüdiger yielded. He agreed to keep his oath and give his life in payment for the kindnesses he had received from his sovereigns ; he commended his wife and daughter to their care, then sorrowfully sought his followers and bade them arm for battle with the Burgundians.

When Volker saw the band of knights approaching, his heart sank, but Giselher cried joyfully : " Well for us all was it that I was betrothed to Rüdiger's daughter, for now our gallant friend comes to bring us peace ! "

" Nay, my lord ! he who brings peace comes not in this array," replied Volker.

Pausing before the palace, Rüdiger placed his shield upon the ground, but no friendly greeting did he pay the Burgundians as was his wont. In lieu thereof he renounced his loyalty to them and challenged them to combat. Great was their distress thus to be forced to strife with friends after struggling against so many foes ; and Günther cried : " Now Heaven forbid, Sir Knight, that thou shouldst do our friendship such wrong ! "

" There is no help for it, alas ! " replied Rüdiger, " since the Queen demands of me fulfilment of a vow ! "

Then said Gernot : " This sword was thy gift to me, most noble Rüdiger, when thou didst welcome us beneath thy roof ; never hath it failed me in time of need, and shall I turn it now against thee, the giver, to bring thy noble wife to widowhood ? "

" Would to God that I indeed were dead ! " cried Rüdiger. " If thou go safe from hence, full well I know thou wilt bring comfort to my wife and daughter. "

Then commending himself to God, he lifted his shield and was about to rush into the hall, when Hagen shouted to him from the stairway : “ Behold, Sir Rüdiger, my sorry plight ! This shield, which thy wife gave me in happier hours, hath been so hacked and hewed by hostile Huns that no longer may it serve for my defence. Had I another such as that which thou dost bear, I would go undismayed again to battle ! ”

Loath as was Rüdiger to give away his own shield under the Queen’s eyes and thereby incur her wrath, his noble heart could not withstand his friend’s appeal, and he bestowed it on Hagen, saying : “ Take it, Sir Knight, and mayst thou bear it back to Burgundy in memory of me ! ”

That Rüdiger so courteously,
 Did give away his shield,
 Filled many an eye with gentle tears,
 And to their hearts appealed.
 It was his last and dearest gift ;
 No more could bold knight crave
 In token of the courtesy
 Of Rüdiger the brave.

However grim Sir Hagen was,
 Or ill-disposed in mind,
 The generous gift which Rüdiger
 So noble and so kind,

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

When near his end had given him,
His stubborn heart subdued;
While many a lofty knight did sigh,
As that brave act he viewed.

Said Hagen : “ May the Lord of Heaven
Sir Rüdiger protect !
When he shall die, his like on earth
We may no more expect :
For he to homeless, shieldless knight
His own defence did give ;
May God vouchsafe that when no more,
His virtues still shall live ! ”

Then he added : “ As for thyself, brave Rüdiger, though thou shouldst slay us every one, yet never shall this sword be raised against thy life.” And this stout Volker also swore.

Seizing his arms, Rüdiger rushed upon the Burgundians and the strife began once more. Hagen and Volker stood aside, nor did Giselher seek to meet his sword ; but deep were the wounds it dealt, and many the knights that fell before it. Rüdiger's liegemen followed him, and soon the hall was filled with the din of battle.

When Gernot saw the terrible havoc Rüdiger's sword wrought among the Burgundians, he shouted : “ I pray thee, cease, Sir Rüdiger ! Now must I seek vengeance for my true liegemen thou hast slain and thereby turn thy gift against thyself ! ”

❧ THE MARGRAVE RÜDIGER ❧

Therewith they cut their way through the press of battle till they stood face to face. Fast fell the strokes of sword on shield and helm, till Rüdiger, whirling his sword aloft, smote Gernot; and as Gernot received his death wound he grasped his sword with both hands and dealt Rüdiger the mightiest blow that ever he had struck. Both heroes fell, slain at the same moment by each other's hands.

When Hagen saw this, his wrath was terrible to behold, and he swore Rüdiger's men should pay dearly therefor, while loud were the lamentations of the princes for the death of their brother. Mad with fury now, they rushed upon the foe, nor was it long ere the last man lay dead.

Now once more there was silence, and those who were left of the Burgundians laid aside their arms to rest them after the fierce struggle. Meanwhile Etzel and Kriemhild waited without, expecting each moment to see Rüdiger come forth with word that the Burgundians were slain. But when all grew still again she began to doubt that hero, and cried aloud that he had deceived her and made peace with her foes. Whereat Volker shouted wrathfully: "If I dared to give the lie to lady such as thou, O Queen, I would right willingly! So loyally hath Rüdiger kept faith with thee that here he lieth dead with all his knights. An thou art loath to

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

trust my word, then may thine own eyes banish doubt."

Therewith the body was borne out by four knights and laid upon the stairs. When Etzel beheld this, he cried aloud with grief, while from all the Huns arose such wails and complaints of woe that they spread far beyond the court, and tower and hall reëchoed with the cries.

Chapter XXXII

Hildebrand and Dietrich

NE of Dietrich's knights heard the doleful sound and hastened to his master, crying: "I pray thee, lord, give ear! Etzelburg gives forth such cries of woe and lamentation as never yet have I heard. I fear the Burgundians have slain the King or Kriemhild!"

The knights all sprang to their feet, with swords aloft, but Dietrich said: "Draw not your swords, my faithful liegemen, nor judge too rashly those of Burgundy, for I have peace with them. Stern necessity has compelled them to do much that they have done."

Then stepped forth Wolfhart, the boldest and fiercest of the knights. In former days he had met Hagen in battle and sorely wounded him, and now he sought leave to go and learn what had befallen. This would not Dietrich grant, however, for he feared lest the fiery Wolfhart should affront the Burgundians with too hasty words. He despatched Helferich instead, who soon returned with the grievous news of Rüdiger's death. Horror-stricken, Dietrich cried: "God forbid that such report should

be true! Sir Rüdiger always held yon heroes dear in his regard, as well I know. How then could he have earned such reward of them?"

Wolfhart shouted furiously: "Now, by my faith, an they have slain that chief who hath done us many a service, they shall die,—aye, every man!"

Thereupon Dietrich bade the ancient Hildebrand go to the Burgundians and learn more nearly of the matter, while overcome with grief he sat by the window to wait his return. As Hildebrand was about to depart, Wolfhart cried: "Nay, go not thus unarmed, good master, or perchance yon haughty chiefs will send thee back with insult. But an they see thou canst defend thyself, then they will spare thee such attack."

So the old hero donned mail and helm, and taking his sword and shield, rode forth. But the knights all followed, likewise fully armed; and when he asked the cause thereof, they said they would not that he came to harm. Meanwhile the Burgundians had borne the body of Rüdiger back within the hall; and as Volker spied Hildebrand and the knights, he warned his comrades of their approach. Whereupon Günther and Giseller strode to the window, Hagen following.

The warriors drew rein in the courtyard, while Hildebrand lowered his shield and asked in Dietrich's name if it was indeed true that they had

❧ HILDEBRAND AND DIETRICH ❧

slain Sir Rüdiger. For such foul wrong, he added, might not go unavenged.

Hagen replied: "Heartily do I wish, Sir Hildebrand, that thou hadst been deceived. Yet it is true, alas! Noble Rüdiger lies dead in this hall, nor can his loss be bewailed too deeply!"

Then arose a great cry of woe from Dietrich's band, and many a bearded warrior's cheeks were wet with tears.

For sobbing, noble Hildebrand
No question more could ask:
Said he: "Now, knights, perform the will
Of him who set the task!
Give us, from out the hall forthwith
Sir Rüdiger again,
Whose death is cause of so much grief
To all these warlike men.
That we repay by obsequies
His martial feats of yore
And noble friendship shown to us,
Now lost forevermore."

And Günther consented to this; but Wolfhart, who could no longer contain his wrath, demanded with threatening gestures how long they were to beg and wait for what they sought. Volker replied that none should bring it to them now; if they would have Rüdiger's body they must come with their swords and fetch it themselves from out the

hall. He added: "Such service, methinks, were but Sir Rüdiger's due."

Furious at this, Wolfhart would have rushed at Volker, but Hildebrand withheld him by force. "Nay — curb thy headlong wrath! or thou wilt surely bring disgrace upon us all!"

"Let loose, good master Hildebrand,
That lion of rash mood,
That he may come within my reach!"
So said the minstrel good,
"And though he may have slain a host
Of valiant knights before,
I'll smite him such a stinging blow
That he'll reply no more."

These words filled Dietrich's men with rage, while Wolfhart with a fierce shout tore himself free and like a raging lion leapt upon his foe, followed by all the knights. But old Hildebrand was there before him, "for since to fighting it must come — himself would be the first." Straight on Hagen he rushed, and therewith arose a mighty clashing of sword on shield, while the sparks flew in showers. Yet soon were they parted by the tide of battle that surged about them. So terrible was the din, it was as that of a thousand forges. Bravely did they fight on either side, but Günther and Giselher, Hagen and his brother Dankwart, and Volker, outdid all the rest. Now Hildebrand saw Volker

slay Sir Dietrich's kinsman Siegestab, and thirsting for vengeance, the old warrior sprang upon him. Not long could he withstand such furious onslaught, and soon thereby did the brave minstrel meet his end. At the same moment also was Dankwart slain by Helferich. When Hagen saw both Volker and his brother dead, he swore most fearfully to avenge their fall, and therewith he rushed into the thickest of the fray, slaying right and left, and smiting so fiercely that all his former efforts seemed but as play.

But stout heroes were not lacking among Dietrich's warriors, and surely was there never seen so mighty and so dire a combat. Thrice had the fiery Wolfhart encircled the hall, hewing down all before him, when he encountered Giseler. Fiercely the young prince sprang at him, and so truly and so mightily he smote that his sword clove Wolfhart's shield and hauberk. Yet summoning all his strength, the dying hero dealt Giseler too his death stroke so that he fell lifeless at his feet. When Hildebrand saw his nephew Wolfhart fatally smitten he sprang quickly to his side and sought to bear him from the hall.

Then said the wounded-unto-death :

“ Kind uncle, all is o'er !

No help canst thou or any one

Render to Wolfhart more.

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

One parting word I leave with thee —
Beware of Hagen's brand ;
He has in heart and arm a power
That nothing may withstand.

“ If that my friends, when I am dead,
Do weep and mourn for me,
Then to my best and nearest kin
Say, with much clemency,
That they desist from heart-lament,
Nor of my fall complain,
For that I found a glorious death
And was by king's hand slain.”

And therewith he died.

At last, in all the great hall there were but three
heroes left alive,—Günther, Hagen, and Hildebrand.

Then Hagen smote Sir Hildebrand,
For that he Volker slew ;
The ancient chief did ward his blows
With skill and courage too.

Yet could he not prevail against the might of
the Burgundian hero, but soon received a grievous
wound from Balmung's flashing blade ; whereupon,
using his shield for cover, he turned and fled to the
courtyard without.

Now lived of all those stalwart knights
No more than these bold two :
Günther, the King of Burgundy,
And Hagen keen and true.

Sorrowfully sat Dietrich in his chamber meanwhile, hoping for better news from Hildebrand. Little was he aware that his knights had followed the old warrior, and still less that all by the Burgundians' swords were slain. Wherefore, when Hildebrand appeared before him, his armor stained with blood, the hero shrank aghast and sternly asked if he had been at strife with the Burgundians against his strict commands. Hildebrand replied that Hagen had wounded him, and barely had he escaped with his life from that archfiend.

Then said Sir Dietrich, haughtily :
“ Thou hast been rightly served ;
For thou didst know that from these guests
My friendship never swerved ;
Also thou hast infringed the peace
I proffered with my breath :
Were 't not that 't would be lasting shame,
Thou shouldst atone by death.”

Then Hildebrand sought to excuse himself, saying they had but asked for the body of Rüdiger, and this the Burgundians had refused them. When Dietrich thus learned that Rüdiger indeed was dead he abandoned himself to grief, but after a space asked by whose hand he fell. Hildebrand replied that Gernot had slain him, and by his hand, in turn, had been slain. Thereupon Dietrich resolved to go himself and have speech with the Burgundians ; and calling

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

for his armor, he bade Hildebrand summon his knights forthwith.

“Alas! my lord,” cried Hildebrand, “thou seest before thee all thy warriors!” And while Dietrich gazed at him horror-stricken, he told him all that had passed.

Now was Dietrich indeed plunged in sorrow. Loudly did he lament the loss of Wolfhart and all his brave knights, and cried: “This is the last day of my joy on earth!”

Chapter XXXIII

Kriemhild's Revenge and Death

WHEN Dietrich of Bern had regained his wonted composure he asked how many of the Burgundians yet were left alive, and Hildebrand told him none save Günther and Hagen,—all the rest were slain. Whereupon, filled with grief and wrath, he seized his arms and went forth with Hildebrand to seek them.

Leaning against the arched doorway stood the two Burgundian heroes, their shields before them on the ground; and when they saw the knights approaching, Hagen, still undaunted, declared himself ready to do battle with Sir Dietrich; nor did he fear to meet him, mighty as he deemed himself, for then would it be proved who was the better knight.

Dietrich heard this bold speech, but vouchsafed no reply. Laying down his shield and looking sorrowfully at them, he asked: "Wherein, O knights of Burgundy, have I injured you, that you should slay the noble Rüdiger, and with him all my friends and warriors?"

"Not all the blame lies with us, Sir Knight,"

said Hagen, "for to this hall thy men came in arms. Thou hast been misinformed."

"Alas!" replied Dietrich, "I know only too well what passed; for Hildebrand but now brought me word that he desired of you the corpse of Rüdiger, and you treated his suit with scorn."

"Now, by my faith," cried Günther, "'t was in despite of Etzel that we refused; but forthwith Wolfhart grew insolent, and thus it came to strife."

Then said Dietrich: "Günther of Burgundy, for the evil thou hast wrought, methinks thou owest me some amends, and thou likewise, Sir Hagen. If you will yield yourselves captives to my sword, then I will guard you from the wrathful Huns, — at peril of my life, if need be."

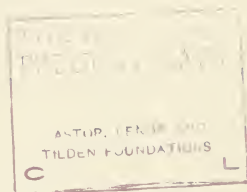
"God in heaven forbid," cried Hagen, "that two such knights should give up their trusty swords while alive and well armed withal!"

But again Dietrich urged them to accept his terms, and Hildebrand added: "God knows, Sir Hagen, there is little need for shame in such atonement. And soon, it may be, the hour will come when you would gladly obtain such peace."

"In faith," replied Hagen, scornfully, "I would indeed accept such terms ere I, like thee, would fly full-armed, from a single knight." Hildebrand would have returned this taunt, but Dietrich forbade them thus to bandy words like two old



DEATH OF KRIEMHILD



❧ KRIEMHILD'S REVENGE ❧

market-wives, and turning to Hagen he said, sternly :
“ Tell me, valiant hero, did I hear aright that you wished to measure swords with me ? ”

Well as he knew Sir Dietrich's giant strength, he could not gainsay this ; wherefore he replied that he would willingly abide the issue of a combat with him, so his good Nibelung sword did not fail him.

Thereupon Dietrich raised his shield as signal for attack, and Hagen sprang fiercely down to meet him, the sword of the Nibelungs ringing loudly on the stout shield of his foe. Sir Dietrich, too, was well aware of Hagen's might, and sought at first with caution merely to ward his powerful blows, yet did he lose no chance for skilful sword-strokes here and there. At last he dealt stout Hagen such a deadly wound that powerless he sank upon the ground. Then casting his sword and shield aside, Dietrich quickly bound him fast and led him thus unto the Queen.

Now, indeed, did Kriemhild's joy and triumph know no bounds. Vowing her lasting gratitude to Dietrich, she promised to reward him well that he had thus delivered up her deadly foe into her hands. But Dietrich urged her to spare Sir Hagen, saying :
“ Be merciful, O Queen ! and it may chance that one day he shall make amends to thee for all thy wrongs.”

To this Kriemhild made no reply, but ordered Hagen to be put in chains and cast into a dungeon where none might see him.

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

Meanwhile Günther loudly called for Dietrich, that he might avenge Hagen's downfall. Soon he returned and then followed another fierce encounter; but though Günther fought with the courage of despair, he was overpowered at last, as Hagen had been, and taken before the Queen.

Kriemhild bade him welcome; but Günther replied: "Small thanks will I bestow on thee for thy greetings, for well I know they bode us little good."

Then said the gallant prince of Bern :
 " Most high and potent Queen !
There ne'er appeared as captive bound
 So brave a knight, I ween,
As he whom unto thee I gave
 With loyal courtesy,
At thy fair hands let him partake
 Of favor due to me ! "

Kriemhild declared she would perform his wish; whereupon Dietrich departed, his eyes wet with tears. But no thought had she for aught save vengeance. Causing Günther to be also chained and cast into a separate dungeon, she betook herself to Hagen. Again she demanded of him her treasure, promising him his life if he would confess where he had hidden it.

Hagen, although a captive, wounded and in chains, was still undaunted. With a scornful glance at Kriemhild he replied: " I gave a solemn oath to



my lord Günther, that never while he drew breath would I divulge the spot where it lies."

"Now will I quickly make an end of that, forsooth!" cried Kriemhild; and thereupon she ordered Günther's head to be struck off. Then she took it to Hagen, saying: "Now doth thy lord no longer live and thereby art thou freed from thy sworn oath!"

But Hagen cried:

"Thou hast indeed thy will fulfilled,
As I did fear thou wouldst!
Now where the hoard lies hid is known
To none but God and me,
And shall from thee, accursed Queen!
Forever hidden be!"

She said: "Thou'st foul atonement made
In purpose, deed, and word;
Therefore will I possess myself
Of virtuous Siegfried's sword,
Which he did bear upon his thigh
When last I saw that chief,
Whose death has ever been to me
A keen heart-rending grief."

She drew it from the well-known sheath
Nor could he this prevent;
To take the warrior's life forthwith
Was her unmasked intent.
She swung it with both hands, and smote
His head from off its trunk.
King Etzel saw the vengeful deed,
And from its horror shrunk.

❧ THE NIBELUNGS ❧

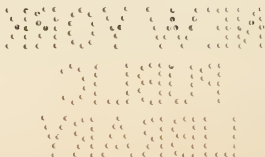
Just at this moment the King had appeared in the dungeon with Hildebrand.

“Alas !” the King of Huns did cry,
“How doth the matter stand —
That he, the boldest of all knights,
Should fall by woman’s hand ?
He who in onslaught was the first,
The bravest that bore shield !
Although he was mine enemy,
I fain to sorrow yield.”

But Hildebrand shouted in wrath : “She shall rue this shameful deed ! Though he hath well-nigh slain me, yet will I forthwith take vengeance for valiant Hagen’s death !”

And drawing his sword he rushed on Kriemhild, and despite her shrieks he smote the terrified Queen so that she fell dead upon the ground.

Thus were the mighty of the earth
By hand of death laid low.
The people all lamented loud
And bitter grief did show.
In suffering did the King’s feast end —
That joyous time was past,
For love to sorrow aye must turn,
So long as life shall last. ✓



H.C.

34



